

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

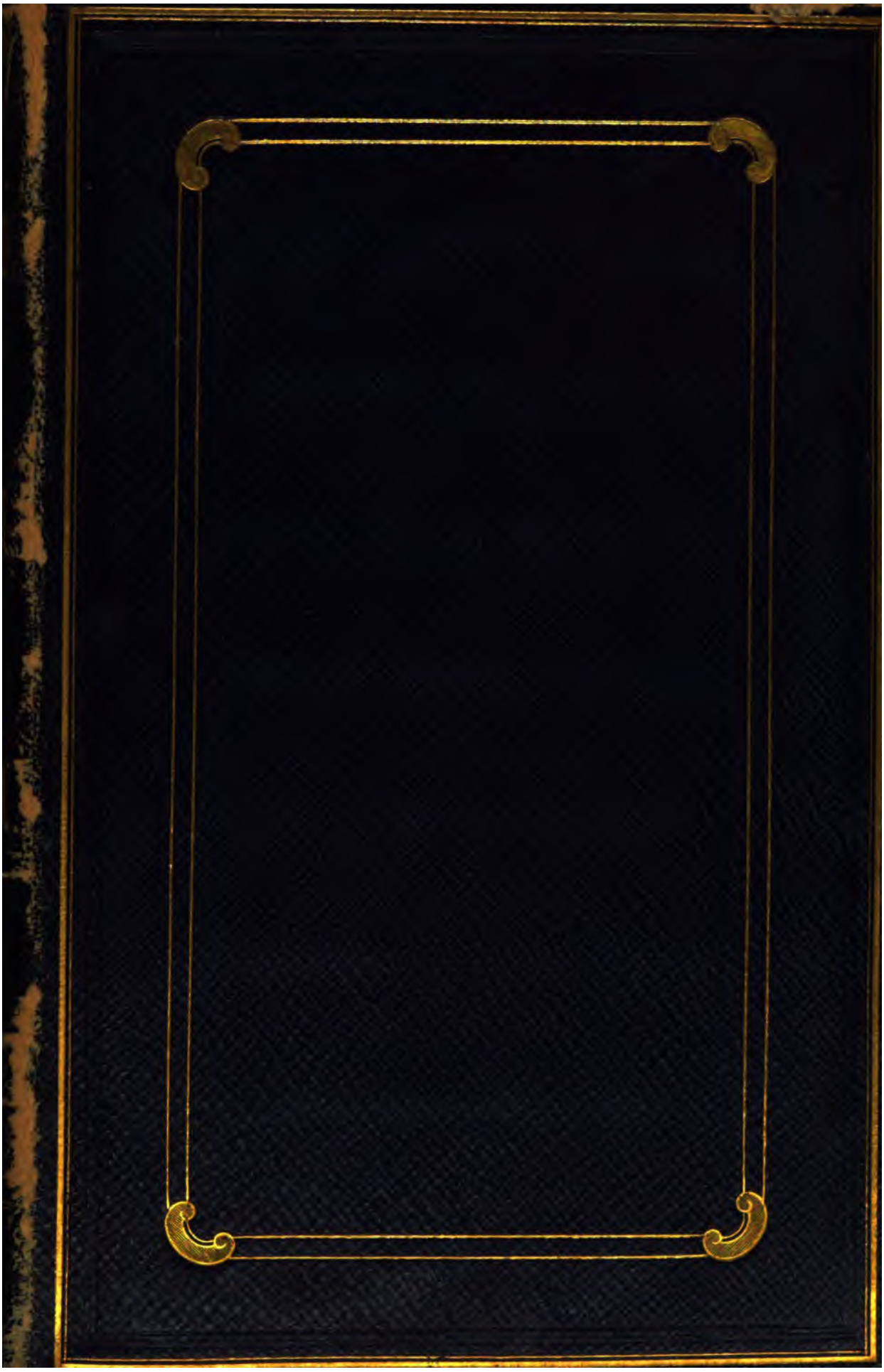
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`



600099124V

600099124V

THE

# ENTIRE WORKS

OF THE

# REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

WITH COPIOUS INDEXES,

PREPARED BY THE REV.

THOMAS HARTWELL HORNE, B.D.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY, BREAD-STREET-HILL.

# HORÆ HOMILETICÆ:

OR

## DISCOURSES

(PRINCIPALLY IN THE FORM OF SKELETONS)

NOW FIRST DIGESTED INTO ONE CONTINUED SERIES,

AND FORMING A COMMENTARY

UPON EVERY BOOK OF

## THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT;

TO WHICH IS ANNEXED,

AN IMPROVED EDITION OF A TRANSLATION OF

CLAUDE'S ESSAY ON THE COMPOSITION OF A SERMON.

---

IN TWENTY-ONE VOLUMES.

---

BY THE REV. CHARLES SIMEON, M.A.

SENIOR FELLOW OF KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

VOL. II.

NUMBERS TO JOSHUA.

LONDON:

HOLDSWORTH AND BALL,

18, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD.

MDCCCXXXII.

101. b. 17.

600099124V



600099124V

favour to that people that "God raised up of their sons for prophets;" nor was it less so, that he raised up of their "young men for Nazarites[b]." Some, as Samson and John the Baptist, were separated by God himself even from their mother's womb; and the express order was given, that from their very birth they should drink no wine, and that no razor should come upon their head[c]. Others perhaps, like Samuel, might be consecrated by their parents from the womb[d]. But, in general, the separation of themselves to be Nazarites was altogether voluntary and for a fixed time. The custom continued even to the apostolic age. St. Paul himself seems to have completed the vow of Nazariteship at Cenchrea[e]: and when there were four men performing it at Jerusalem, he, in order to remove prejudice from the minds of those who thought him adverse to the law of Moses, united himself with them, bearing part of the charges attendant on that vow, and conforming himself in every thing to the prescribed ritual[f]. The law respecting them is contained in the chapter now before us: and, agreeably to the arrangement made for us in our text, we shall consider it as containing,

I. Their vows—

The *particulars* of their vow are here minutely detailed:

[They separated themselves for a season to an extraordinary course of attendance upon God. During that season they were not to touch any wine, or grapes either moist or dried. They were not to cut their hair, or to approach any dead body, or to mourn even for a father or a mother[g]. If, by any unforeseen accident, a person should fall down dead near them, or a corpse be brought nearly into contact with them, they were to shave their head, and offer both a burnt-offering and a sin-offering (to atone for the pollution they had contracted), and were to begin again the term of their separation, the whole that had passed having been rendered null and void[h].]

The *design* of it, though not expressly declared in Scripture, yet may without difficulty be ascertained—

[b] Amos ii. 11. [c] Judg. xiii. 4, 5, 7, 14. Luke i. 15.
[d] 1 Sam. i. 11. [e] Acts xviii. 18. [f] Acts xxi. 23, 24.
[g] ver. 2—8. [h] ver. 9—12.

[It seems that the order of Nazarites was intended to prefigure Christ, who, though not observant of the laws relating to that order, was from eternity consecrated to the service of his God, not only by the designation of his Father, but by his own voluntary engagement, and completed the course of his obedience till he could say, "It is finished."

But we have no doubt respecting the design of God to exhibit to us in the Nazarites a pattern for our imitation. The appointment itself has ceased with the law: "the believing Gentiles" are expressly told that they "are not required to observe any such thing[j]." But, though the form has ceased, the substance remains. We are called to consecrate ourselves unreservedly to God. This is our duty, and our privilege. "We are not our own; we are bought with a price;" and therefore bought, "that we may glorify God with our bodies and our spirits, which are his." Every one amongst us should subscribe with his hand, and say, "I am the Lord's[k]"——— We need not literally abstain from wine; but we should shew a holy superiority to all *the pleasures* of sense. We may enjoy them, because "God has given us all things richly to enjoy:" but we should not seek our happiness in them, or be at all enslaved by them; or value them any further, than we can enjoy God in them, and glorify him by them. The same indifference should we manifest also in relation to *the cares* of this life. We may mourn indeed, but never indulge that "sorrow of the world, which worketh death." Having God for our portion, the loss of all earthly things should be comparatively but little felt——— We are not called to that singularity of dress which marked the Nazarites to public view: but surely we are called not to be conformed to every idle fashion, or to be running into all the absurdities which characterize the votaries of this world. A Christian should despise such vanities, and "be no more of this world, than Christ himself was of the world"——— From pollution of every kind we should stand at the remotest distance: we should "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," but "be purged from dead works to serve the living God." What caution, what holy fear should we maintain! What dread of dishonouring our Lord, and walking unworthy of our holy profession! Surely we should "abstain even from the appearance of evil," and labour to "be pure as God himself is pure"——— If at any time, through weakness or inadvertence, we contract pollution, we must not think to proceed as if we had done nothing amiss: no; sin, of whatever kind, must be repented of: for, if it be continued in, it will infallibly destroy us[l]. We must, like the Nazarite, instantly apply ourselves to the atoning

[j] Acts xxi. 25. [k] Isai. xliv. 5. Rom. xiv. 7, 8. [l] Ezek. xviii. 24.

sacrifice of Christ, and seek remission through his precious blood. Yea, like him too, we must renew our dedication of ourselves to God, just as if we never had been devoted to him before. This is the safest way, and by far the happiest. If we stand doubting and questioning about our former state, it may be long before we come to any comfortable conclusion: but if we leave the consideration of past experiences, or use them only as grounds of deeper humiliation, and devote ourselves to God again as we did at the beginning, we shall most honour the mercy of our God, and most speedily attain renewed tokens of his favour — — —]

At the completion of their vows they were required to present,

II. Their offerings—

These are particularly specified: they consisted of a he-lamb for a burnt-offering, to acknowledge God's goodness to them; an ewe-lamb for a sin-offering, to obtain mercy at his hands; and a ram for a peace-offering, to shew that they were in a state of favour and acceptance with God. Besides these, they were to offer a basket of unleavened bread, consisting of cakes mingled with oil, and wafers anointed with oil, with a meat-offering and a drink-offering. Of these a greater portion was given to the priest than on other occasions: for, not only the wave-breast and the heave-shoulder were his, but also the other shoulder of the ram, which was sodden or boiled, was added, with one unleavened cake and one unleavened wafer; and, after having been put into the hands of the Nazarite and waved before the Lord, were given to the priest as his portion. The Nazarite's hair also was shaven, and was burnt in the fire which boiled the peace-offerings. Thus was the termination of their vow publicly made known; and they, released from those particular obligations, were at liberty to resume the enjoyments which during their separation they had voluntarily renounced[m].

It would not be easy to mark with precision the exact design of these multiplied observances: but from a collective view of them we may gather,

[m] ver. 13—20.

1. That of all that we do, we should give the glory to God—

[This was designed by the burnt-offering, as also by the heave-offering: they were acknowledgments to God, that his goodness to them was great, and that the service which they were enabled to render him had been the fruit of his love, and the gift of his grace. Thus should all our services be viewed. If they be regarded by us as grounds of self-preference and self-complacency, they will be odious to God in proportion as they are admired by us. We should never for a moment forget, that "it is by the grace of God we are what we are." "It is God who gives us both to will and to do, and that too altogether of his good pleasure." "Our sufficiency even for a good thought is derived from Him alone." Instead of imagining therefore that we lay God under obligations to us for any works that we do, we must remember that *the more we do for God, the more we are indebted to God* — — —]

2. That, after all that we can do, we need an interest in the atoning blood of Christ—

[This was clearly manifested by the sin-offering. The Nazarite's hair was not burnt on the altar of the burnt-offerings, *to make atonement*, but with the fire that boiled the peace-offerings, *to make acknowledgment*. However holy our lives be, even though we were sanctified to God from the very womb, and never contracted such a degree of pollution as should destroy our hope of acceptance with him, yet must we be washed in "the fountain open for sin," even the fountain of Christ's blood, which alone "cleanseth from all sin." There is iniquity cleaving to our holiest things; and an atonement is as necessary for them as for our grossest sins: and that atonement can be found only in the sacrifice of Christ — — —]

3. That when our term of separation is fulfilled, our joys shall be unrestrained for evermore—

["After that, the Nazarite may drink wine[n]:" and, after the short period of mortification and self-denial assigned us here, we shall "enter into the joy of our Lord," even into "his presence, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore." The dread of pollution shall then be past; and the tokens of humiliation be put away. Then shall we "drink new wine in the kingdom of our Father:" and O! how sweet those draughts, of which, in our present state of separation, it was not permitted us to taste! More encouragement than this we need not, we cannot, have. Let us only contemplate "the blessedness of those who die in the Lord," and we shall need no other inducement to live unto the Lord — — —]

[n] ver. 20.

APPLICATION—

[The term, Nazarite, imports *separation*: and though, as has been observed before, the ordinances relative to Nazarites are no longer in force, their duties, in a spiritual view, are obligatory on us. St. Paul says, "Come out from among the ungodly, and be *separate*, and *touch not the unclean thing*; and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." You remember too it was observed, that "God raised up *young* men to be Nazarites." O that the young amongst us would be foremost in the surrender of themselves to God! How would the world be benefited! how would God be glorified! — — — With respect to females, a vow of theirs, if not allowed by their father or their husband, was made void; so that they could not separate themselves, as Nazarites, without the permission of those who had the control over them°: but there is no such controlling power now, none to prevent a surrender of our souls to God: the answer to any opposing authority must be, "We ought to obey God rather than men." Let nothing then keep us from executing the purposes which God has inspired; but let us, both old and young, "yield up ourselves as living sacrifices unto God, assured that it is no less a reasonable, than it is an acceptable, service" — — —]

° Numb. xxx. 1—16.

## CXLVI.

### GOD WILL BLESS HIS OWN ORDINANCES.

Numb. vi. 23—27. *On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.*

THE exercise of benevolence is that which every child of God should cultivate to the uttermost: but ministers above all should consider it as the distinguishing badge of their office: they are compelled indeed sometimes to "use sharpness;" but whether they rebuke, or whether they exhort, they should be actuated by nothing but a principle of love. Under the law, it was a very important part of the priestly office to bless the people; and God prescribed a form of words to be used by Aaron and his sons in the

discharge of that duty[a]: nor can any words better express the scope and end of the Christian ministry. If the people be brought to receive abundant communications of grace and peace, and to surrender up themselves entirely to God, a minister can desire nothing more in this world; his labours are well repaid. To promote this blessed end, we shall,

I. Explain the words before us—

God is here making known his will to Moses, and directing him what orders to give to Aaron and his sons respecting the execution of their priestly office: and there are two duties which he assigns to them;

1. To bless the people in God's name—

[This was repeatedly declared to be their office[b]; and the constant practice of the Apostles shews that it was to be continued under the Christian dispensation. In conformity to their example, the Christian Church has universally retained the custom of closing the service with a pastoral benediction. We are not indeed to suppose that ministers can, by any power or authority of their own, convey a blessing[c]: they can neither select the persons who shall be blessed, nor fix the time, the manner or the degree in which any shall receive a blessing: but, as stewards of the mysteries of God, they dispense the bread of life, assuredly expecting, that their Divine Master will give a salutary effect to the ordinances of his own appointment. The direction in the text was confirmed with an express promise, that what they spake on earth should be ratified in heaven: and every faithful minister may take encouragement from it in the discharge of his own duty, and may consider God as saying to him, Bless *thou* the congregation, "*and I will bless them*[d]."]

2. To claim the people as God's property—

[To "put the name of God upon them" is, to challenge them as "his portion, the lot of his inheritance[e]." This every minister must do in most authoritative terms; and not only claim them as his property, but excite them with all earnestness to surrender up themselves to his service. Nor shall their exhortations be lost; for God will accompany them "with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven;" and the

[a] The circumstance of its being a prescribed form of words, did not render it the less efficacious for the people's good.

[b] Deut. xxi. 5. [c] Acts iii. 12.

[d] To this effect, see Luke x. 5, 6. and John xx. 23.

[e] Deut. xxxii. 9.

people, constrained by a divine impulse, shall say, "I am the Lord's[f]." Moreover, in their intercessions for the people, they are also to urge this plea with God on their behalf[g]. Thus are they to strengthen the connexion between God and them; and to promote that fellowship with God, which is the end, as well as means, of all spiritual communications.]

Having thus explained the general import of the words, we shall,

II. Notice some truths contained in them—

Amidst the many profitable observations that may be deduced from the text, there are some deserving of peculiar attention:

1. The priests under the law, while they blessed the people, typically represented the office of Christ himself—

[Christ as our High-Priest performs every part of the priestly office: and it is remarkable that he was in the very act of blessing his disciples, when he was taken up from them into heaven[h]. Nor did he then cease, but rather began, as it were, to execute that office, which he has been fulfilling from that time to the present hour. St. Peter, preaching afterwards to a vast concourse of people, declared to them, that to bless them was the great end for which Jesus had ascended, and that he was ready, both as a Prince and a Saviour, to give them repentance and remission of sins[i]. Let us then conceive the Lord Jesus standing now in the midst of us, and, with uplifted hands, pronouncing the benediction in the text; is there one amongst us that would not cordially add, "Amen, Amen?" Nor let this be thought a vain and fanciful idea, since he has promised to be wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, and *that* too, for the very purpose which is here expressed[k].]

2. Though ministers are used as instruments to convey blessings, God himself is the only author and giver of them—

[The very words, which the priests were commanded to use, directed the attention of all to God himself; nor could the frequent repetition of Jehovah's name fail to impress the most careless auditor with a conviction, that the blessing could come from God alone. Perhaps too the mystery of the Holy Trinity

[f] Isai. xliv. 3—5. [g] Dan. ix. 17—19. Jer. xiv. 9.
[h] Luke xxiv. 50, 51. [i] Acts iii. 26. and v. 31.
[k] Compare Matt. xviii. 20. with Exod. xx. 24.

might be intimated in these expressions[l]; since it is certain that we, under the clearer light of the Gospel, are taught to look to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as the distinct, though united, authors of all spiritual good[m]. We ought indeed to reverence God's ministers as the authorized dispensers of his blessings[n]; but we must look for the blessings themselves to God alone; and endeavour to exercise faith on the Father as the fountain of them, on Christ as the channel in which they flow, and on the Holy Spirit as the agent, by whose divine energy they are imparted to the soul[o]. At the same time we should remember the obligation which these mercies lay us under to devote ourselves entirely to the service of our gracious and adorable Benefactor.]

3. However weak the ordinances be in themselves, yet shall they, if attended in faith, be available for our greatest good—

[Nothing can be conceived more simple in itself than a priestly benediction: yet, most undoubtedly, it brought down many blessings upon the people. And can we suppose that God will put less honour upon his ordinances under the Gospel dispensation? Shall not "*grace*, *mercy* and *peace*, flow down from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ," in answer to the fervent intercessions of his ministers[p]? Though ministers be but earthen vessels, yet shall they impart unto the people the richest treasures[q]. Their word shall not be in vain, but shall accomplish God's good pleasure, and prosper in the thing whereunto he has sent it[r]. Let not then the benediction be so often slighted, as though it were only a signal to depart: but while it is delivered with solemnity in the name of God, let every heart be expanded to receive the benefit. Let every one consider *himself in particular* as the person addressed[s]; and may the experience of all attest at this time, that God is ready to "grant us above all that we can ask or think."]

[l] See Bishop Patrick on the place. [m] 2 Cor. xiii. 14.
[n] 1 Thess. v. 13. [o] Rev. i. 4, 5.
[p] 2 Tim. i. 2. These three words seem to contain all that is implied in the text. [q] 2 Cor. iv. 7. [r] Isai. lv. 10, 11.
[s] "*Thee*" was repeated six times, though addressed to the whole congregation, that every person might feel himself as much interested as if he alone were present. See the text.

## CXLVII.

### THE JOURNEYS OF ISRAEL REGULATED BY GOD.

Numb. ix. 21—23. *So it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed. At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed: they kept the charge of the Lord, at the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses.*

THE conducting of Israel in the wilderness by a pillar and a cloud is often mentioned in the Holy Scriptures; but in no place so fully as here. From the fifteenth verse to the end of this chapter is the same truth repeated again and again, with very little variation. It should seem, however, that the guiding of Israel was not the only use of the pillar and the cloud. These conductors appear, indeed, to have rested on the tabernacle; but to have occupied at the same time such a space, as to give light to the whole camp of Israel by night, and to afford them a cooling shade by day; so that the people might be protected from the burning rays of the sun, which, in that climate, nothing but a miracle could enable them for a continuance to sustain. This information we have from David, who says, that God "spread a cloud for a covering; and fire, to give light in the night[a]." But the regulating of their motions is that particular point to which my text adverts; and to which therefore, exclusively, I shall direct your attention. It is obvious, that the extreme uncertainty of the movements made by the cloud must keep the people in continual suspense. This was a state of discipline proper for them. And we shall find it a profitable subject of contemplation, if we consider,

I. The use of this discipline to them—

[a] Ps. cv. 39.

The whole system of God's dealings with them in the wilderness was intended to promote their spiritual welfare. Moses, at the close of their wanderings there, says to them, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no[b]." But the circumstance mentioned in my text was of very peculiar use:

1. To shew them what they were—

[Truly they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people, even from the first moment that God sent to take them under his more immediate protection[c]. The very moment that any thing obstructed their wishes, or disappointed their expectations, they murmured against the Lord. The mercies they received were altogether overlooked by them, and produced no effect to compose their minds, or to reconcile them to any thing which bore an untoward aspect. The wonders of Egypt, and the passage of the Red Sea, with the destruction of all their enemies in the mighty waters, were soon forgotten: "they were disobedient at the sea, even at the Red Sea[d]." To such a degree did they rage against the dispensations of Heaven, that they frequently regretted that ever they had come out of Egypt, and occasionally proposed to make a captain over them, and return thither again.

Now the particular dispensation mentioned in my text had a strong tendency to elicit these unholy feelings. For sometimes the cloud moved by day; at other times it commenced its motions by night: and the whole people were compelled to follow it immediately, or to be left behind. Sometimes it continued its course for days and nights together without intermission; at other times it stopped for days, and months, and even a whole year together, without ever moving from its place. These inequalities greatly irritated their rebellious spirit. On one occasion, we are told, "they departed from the mount of the Lord three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting-place for them[e]:" from whence it is evident, that they found no resting-place during those three days. And what was the effect of this upon their impatient minds? They so murmured against the Lord, as to provoke him greatly to anger. Moses says, "The people complained: and it displeased the Lord: and the Lord heard

[b] Deut. viii. 2. [c] Deut. ix. 7, 24. [d] Ps. cvi. 7. [e] Numb. x. 33.

it; and his anger was kindled: and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp[f]." On another occasion, when "they had journeyed from Mount Hor, by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom," we are told, "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness[g]?" Nor were their evil passions less called forth by the long suspension of their movements. A whole year without any progress was a severe trial to their impatient minds, when a less space than that had sufficed to bring them from the brick-kilns of Egypt to the borders of the promised land. Had nothing occurred to try them, they would never have "known what spirit they were of;" but, when such frequent occasions were administered for the discovery of their evil dispositions, it was impossible but that they must see and acknowledge that they were indeed "a rebellious and stiff-necked generation."]

2. To shew them what they should be—

[In this respect, the discipline here used was admirably calculated to inform their minds.

Almighty God, by a visible symbol of his presence, graciously undertook to guide them in all their way. On every occasion of need, he shewed himself abundantly sufficient for the task he had undertaken. To his power there was no limit, whether to subdue their enemies, or to supply their wants. What, then, became them, but to express the deepest gratitude for this wonderful condescension, and to commit themselves entirely to his fatherly care? Their song at the Red Sea should have continued to be their song under all circumstances: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[h]?"

When circumstances arose that were trying to their feelings, or which they were not altogether able to account for, one might expect that their past experience of God's wisdom and goodness would suffice to allay any rising irritation, and to induce a submission to his sovereign will. They knew what ready acquiescence they themselves expected from their own children and servants, in any appointments which they should make: and it was but reasonable that they should place the same confidence in God, as they themselves required of their fellow-creatures.

The successive orders to proceed or stop would naturally lead them to consider themselves as altogether at God's disposal, and to seek all their happiness in serving and obeying

[f] Numb. xi. 1. [g] Numb. xxi. 4, 5. [h] Exod. xv. 11.

him. What should they do, but keep themselves in readiness at any time, in any way, to any extent to follow his leadings and fulfil his will?

The precise state of mind which this dispensation called for was that which comprised their entire duty, and would ultimately conduce to their truest happiness.]

But it was not for their sakes only that this discipline was used, but for ours also; as will clearly appear, whilst we consider,

II. The instruction it conveys to us—

We should not limit these things to the generation then existing, nor to that peculiar people. The whole of that mysterious dispensation had a reference to the dispensation under which we live: and the particular circumstance mentioned in our text is expressly spoken of in that view: "The Lord will create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence[l]." It may well be considered as teaching us,

1. What we may expect from God—

[There was no mercy vouchsafed to the Jews, which we may not expect at God's hands. In fact, all that he did for them, he will do for us. Did he direct them in all their way? he will go before *us* also, and direct *our* way. This he declares, in many express promises: "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths[k]." We may say of God's people now, as certainly as of his people of old, "The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord[l]:" and, "The Lord shall guide thee continually[m]."

But we must be careful not to form wrong notions respecting the guidance which we are authorized to expect. The Jews lived under a dispensation, the blessings whereof were chiefly carnal: but we live under a dispensation which is altogether spiritual: "We walk by faith, and not by sight[n]." It is not by any thing obvious to the senses that God will guide us; but by his word and Spirit. His word is the one rule by which we are to walk. There is not any thing we are bound to do, but we may find it there; nor any thing contained in that blessed volume, but what, according to our

[l] Isai. iv. 5. [k] Prov. iii. 6. [l] Ps. xxxvii. 23.
[m] Isai. lviii. 11. [n] 2 Cor. v. 7.

ability, we are bound to do. Every thing must be referred "to the Law and to the testimony;" and agreeably to that must we move in all things. We are not to expect the Holy Spirit to direct us by any impulses unconnected with the word. To be looking for visions, or impressions of any kind independent of the word, is to delude our own souls. The way by which the Holy Spirit will guide us is this: He will sanctify the dispositions and desires of our souls, and thus enable us to "discern good from evil, and light from darkness." He will give us "a single eye: and then our whole body will be full of light[o]." Then we shall be prepared to understand the word; and be enabled and inclined to follow it: and in this way he will fulfil his promise, that we "shall hear a voice behind us, saying, This is the way; walk ye in it[p]." This is exactly what he has taught us to expect: "The meek he will guide *in judgment*, the meek he will teach *his way*[q]:" *the judgment* shall be rectified, in the first instance, by the influence of the Holy Spirit; and then shall *the way* of duty be made clear before our face; the word becoming, not only "a light to our feet in general, but a lantern" to our every step[r].]

2. What we should render to him—

[If we could but realize the state of mind which this mode of conducting Israel required, we should see at once what are those graces which we should cultivate in our journey towards the heavenly land.

We should exercise *dependence without anxiety—submission without murmuring—obedience without reluctance.*

We should *depend on him without anxiety.* We should leave God altogether to "choose our inheritance for us[s]," and to "appoint the bounds of our habitation[t]." We should consider ourselves as entirely under his care and guidance, as a child is under the direction of his father: and, being assured of his fatherly regards towards us, we should "cast our care altogether upon him[u]."

We should *submit* to him *without murmuring.* We cannot see the reasons of all his dispensations: nor is it needful we should. We should feel convinced of this, that, however inexplicable they may be to us, he is too wise to err, and too good to inflict pain without some adequate cause. We should "know in whom we have believed;" and satisfy ourselves with this composing thought, "What I know not now, I shall know hereafter[x]."

We should *obey* him *without reluctance.* We must not inquire whether his commands be pleasing to flesh and blood,

[o] Matt. vi. 22. [p] Isai. xxx. 21. [q] Ps. xxv. 9. [r] Ps. cxix. 105.
[s] Ps. xlvii. 4. [t] Acts xvii. 26. [u] 1 Pet. v. 7. [x] John xiii. 7.

or not: we must be anxious only to know what his will is: and then, though it be to march at midnight, or to continue our journey for many wearisome days and nights together, or to be kept by his providence in a state of inactivity for years, we should rise to the occasion, and endeavour to approve ourselves to him as faithful and obedient children.

In a word, to be continually with him, enjoying his presence, fulfilling his will, and pressing forward to his glory, *this* is the Christian's duty: *this* is the very end of his redemption, and the way to his inheritance.]

ADDRESS—

[Consider yourselves now in the state of Israel advancing through the wilderness: and expect that, "as God's children, ye shall be led by his Holy Spirit[y]." Yet be careful not to expect more than God has promised. Do not suppose that you shall be so led as to be kept from *all* error. It is not God's design to render any man infallible, or so to guide him that he shall have no ground for fear and self-distrust. We must, under all circumstances, feel a jealousy, lest Satan should take advantage of us, or our own deceitful hearts should beguile us. The Israelites, though under the cloud, fell short of the promised land[z], because "their hearts were not right with God, neither were they steadfast in his covenant[a]." But, if you will "follow the Lord fully," you may look up to him with holy confidence, that *now* "he will guide you by his counsel, and *hereafter* he will receive you to *glory*[b]."]

[y] Rom. viii. 14. [z] 1 Cor. x. 1, 5. [a] Ps. lxxviii. 37. [b] Ps. lxxiii. 24.

---

## CXLVIII.

### MOSES' INVITATION TO HOBAB.

Numb. x. 29. *And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us; and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.**

HOBAB, it should seem, was the son of Jethro, who is here called Raguel, and in another place

* If this were the subject of an Address *previous to* CONFIRMATION, it might be treated thus:

I. The invitation—

[Whither was Moses going? To the land of Canaan — — — There was not *a child* in all the camp of Israel, who did not know whence he had been brought, and whither he was bending his course — — —

Reuel[a]. He was the brother of Zipporah, whom Moses had married in the land of Midian. Both Jethro, and his son Hobab, had accompanied Moses for a season: but Jethro had left him some time since[b]: and Hobab also now proposed to leave him, and "to go back to his own country and kindred." But Moses besought him not to go, but to proceed with Israel to the promised land; assuring him, that, though a Midianite, he should participate in all the blessings which God designed for Israel. On finding that this consideration was not sufficient to influence his mind, Moses urged the services which Hobab might render to Israel in their journey through the wilderness; for though God had undertaken to guide Israel through the wilderness, and to provide for and protect them in the way, yet there were many local circumstances which Hobab was acquainted with, by the communication of which, from time to time, he might render very essential services to Moses and to all Israel.

This is really the state of God's Israel now. They are all sensible that they have been brought out of bondage to sin and Satan: and there is *not one amongst them* who does not consider himself as a pilgrim here, and is not daily pressing forward to the heavenly Canaan as his rest, his portion, his inheritance.

And is not this the course which you are now about to enter upon? Look at the vows which were made for you in your baptism, and which you are now about to take upon yourselves. Are you not solemnly pledging yourselves to renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh, &c. &c. &c.? This then is the very thing which the journeying of the Israelites in the wilderness shadowed forth, and which all God's Israel at this very time are doing.

We say then to you, yea, to every one of you in particular, "Come thou with us." Though thou be young, like Hobab, come with us: yea, though thy father Jethro be gone back, "come thou with us"———]

II. The arguments, &c.—

These may be *nearly* as stated in the Sermon, except that, in *the benefits accruing to them*, the benefits of early piety may be stated: and, in *the benefits which they may confer*, it may be shewn what blessings they may be to their *young companions*, and possibly to *their own parents also*.

For an Address *after confirmation*, corresponding with this, see that on Numb. xiv. 3, 4.

[a] Exod. ii. 18. [b] Exod. xviii. 27.

Whether Moses prevailed with Hobab to alter his determination, does not certainly appear. But it seems rather that he did succeed, because we find the descendants of Hobab actually settled in Canaan, and dwelling in the midst of the tribe of Judah, not indeed as blended with them, but as a distinct people[c]. This however is of no importance to *us*. It is the invitation only that we are concerned about: and we hope that, when the arguments with which it is enforced are duly considered, the success with *us* shall not be doubtful, whatever it might be with him. There is a land of promise towards which the true Israel are yet journeying, under the conduct of our great Lawgiver, the Lord Jesus Christ; and in their name is the invitation addressed to all of us; "Come thou with us; and we will do thee good."

But, that we may have clearer views of this matter, let us distinctly consider,

I. The invitation—

That the journey of Israel in the wilderness was altogether typical of our journey heaven-ward, is well known. When therefore, in the name of all Israel, we say to every individual amongst us, "Come thou with us," we must be understood to say,

1. Set your faces in good earnest towards the promised land—

[There is "a land of which God has said, I will give it you." And it is a good land; "a land flowing with milk and honey;" a land "where you shall eat bread without scarceness;" and enjoy "a rest" from all enemies, and from all labours, for evermore[d]. Towards that land all the Israel of God are journeying: they consider this world as a wilderness, in which they are pilgrims and sojourners; and the object of every step which they take in it is, to advance nearer to their desired home. Let every one of us join himself to them. Let us estimate aright the inheritance prepared for us——— Let us lose no further time in commencing our journey towards it——— Let us engage in the pursuit of it with all the ardour that the object requires——— And let us "fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into it, any of us should even seem to come short of it[e]."]

[c] Judg. i. 16. and iv. 11, 17. [d] Heb. iv. 9. 1 Pet. i. 4. [e] Heb. iv. 1.

2. Let nothing be suffered to retard you in your progress thitherward—

[Hobab was solicited to postpone all regard for his family and country to the attainment of the promised land. And such is our duty also. Our blessed Lord has said, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me:" "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, yea, and his own life also (in comparison of me), he cannot be my disciple:" "He that will save his life, shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it[f]." There will be difficulties and obstructions which we must meet with; but we must meet them manfully: and, whatever be the cross that lies in our way, we must take it up, yea, and glory in it, and rejoice that we are counted worthy to bear it for His sake. For, what is the favour of man in comparison of the favour of God, or the preservation of earthly interests in comparison of a heavenly inheritance? "What would it profit us if we gained the whole world, if at the same time we lost our own souls? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Nor let this sacrifice appear great: it is no other than was made by Abraham[g], and Moses[h], and the Apostles of our Lord[i], and all the primitive Christians[k]: nay, it is made daily even for the sake of a connexion with an earthly object[l]: much more therefore may it be made for an union with Christ; who offers himself to us only on these express terms; "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear: forget also thine own people and thy father's house: so shall the King have pleasure in thy beauty: for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him[m]."]

3. Proceed steadily till you are in possession of it—

[Hobab had abode with Moses some considerable time: but at last he grew weary of the way, and determined to return. It must not be thus with us. We must not run well for a season only, but unto the end, if we would obtain the prize. We must "never be weary of well-doing," or "look back after having put our hand to the plough;" but "by patient continuance in well-doing must seek for glory and honour and immortality." "If any one of us turn back," says God, "my soul shall have no pleasure in him." "It were even better for us never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us." It is "he only who endureth unto the end, that shall ever finally be saved."]

[f] Matt. x. 37—39. Luke xiv. 26. [g] Gen. xii. 1—4.
[h] Heb. xi. 24—26. [i] Mark x. 28. [k] Acts iv. 32.
[l] Eph. v. 31. [m] Ps. xlv. 10, 11.

4. Object not, that they who give this invitation are *a mere party*—

[Whose fault is it, if they be a party? Is it theirs who are going heaven-ward; or those who will not advance a step towards it? Are those who "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way that leadeth unto life," to be blamed, because the great mass of mankind prefer "the broad road that leadeth to destruction?" But if they must be called a party, let me tell you what party it is: it consists of such as Moses summoned to his aid, "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me[n]." Yes, they are *those who are "on the Lord's side:"* and if that be a fault, let them bear it. But who is at the head of that party? When we know that it is the Lord Jesus Christ himself[o], and that "the whole world besides lieth under the dominion of the wicked one[p]," we need not be ashamed. If this objection have any force, it had the same force against the Israelites who had come out of Egypt; (for they were but a party, in comparison of those whom they had left behind:) yea, against the Apostles and the primitive Christians it lay with still greater force; for they were, especially at first, as nothing in comparison of their opponents. If those who invite us to join them be but "a little flock," still they are the flock to whom exclusively "the kingdom of heaven shall be given[q]:" and therefore we would urge you all to join them without delay.]

To give yet further weight to the invitation, I will call your attention to,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

Two considerations Moses proposed to Hobab: first, the benefit that would accrue to himself; and next, the benefit which he would confer on Israel. Similar considerations also may fitly be proposed to us. Consider then, if ye accept the invitation,

1. What benefit will accrue to yourselves—

[Truly, "God has spoken good respecting Israel." He calls them his children, his first-born, his peculiar treasure above all the people upon the face of the earth. And whatever can conduce to their present and eternal happiness, he promises them in the richest abundance. Both in *their way*, and in *their end*, they shall be truly blessed. What a catalogue of blessings is assigned to them in the space of a few verses[r]! yet

[n] Exod. xxxii. 26. [o] John viii. 23. and xvii. 16.
[p] John xvii. 14. and xv. 18—20. 1 John v. 19.
[q] Luke xii. 32. [r] Exod. vi. 6—8.

they relate to this world only, and are but faint shadows of the blessings which God will pour out upon their souls. As for the glory prepared for them in a better world, what tongue can utter it? what heart can conceive it? The very throne of God is not too exalted for them to sit on; nor the kingdom of God too rich for them to possess.

Now then to all who comply with the invitation given them, we do not hesitate to say, as Moses did, "*It shall be*, if thou go with us, *yea, it shall be*, that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will we do unto thee[s]." You shall partake of every blessing which God's most favoured people enjoy. Does he go before them in the pillar and the cloud? Does he feed them with manna, and cause the waters from the rock to follow them in all their way? Does he protect them from every enemy? Does he carry them as on eagles' wings? Does he forgive their sins, and "heal their backslidings, and love them freely?" Is "he as the dew to them," causing them to "grow as the lily, and to spread forth their roots as Lebanon?" Does "he love them to the end," and "never leave them till he has fulfilled to them all that he has promised?" All this shall be yours, if you will come with us. "You shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." You may exhaust all the powers of language in asking, and it shall all be done: you may even stretch your imagination to the utmost bounds that human intellect can reach, and all that also shall be done, and more than all, yea, "exceeding abundantly above all that ye can either ask or think." And shall not this induce you to accept the invitation? Go to all others that solicit your company, and see what they can do for you: can they ensure to you even the least of all the blessings of grace or glory? No: they are all broken cisterns, that can hold no water, and can present to you nothing but the dregs of sensual enjoyment; whereas with us is "the fountain of living water," of which whosoever drinks shall live for ever.]

2. What benefit you will confer on others—

[Every one that gives himself up wholly to the Lord, strengthens the hands and encourages the hearts of God's chosen people. Death is from time to time thinning the ranks of the Lord's armies: and if they were not recruited by voluntary enlistment, they would speedily disappear. But all who accept the invitation become soldiers of Christ, and engage to fight manfully the Lord's battles. All such persons also are "witnesses for God" amongst an atheistical and rebellious people, whom they practically "condemn," as "Noah condemned the world" by constructing the ark in the midst of them[t]. As lights too

[s] ver. 32. [t] Heb. xi. 7.

in a dark world, they are of great service; for they "hold forth the word of life" to those who would not otherwise behold it; and are "epistles of Christ, known and read" of thousands, who, but for such instructors, would remain for ever ignorant of his will.

If any one be disposed to ask, What good can so weak an individual as I do? I answer, "If under any circumstances whatever any individual could be justified in offering such an objection, it would have been Hobab: first, because Israel were altogether under the divine guidance, protection, and support; and therefore could not be supposed to need any thing; and next, because he was a Midianite, and therefore incapable, as might be thought, of adding any thing to Moses and the Israelites. But to him Moses said, "Thou mayest be to us in the stead of eyes[u]." The truth is, that no one can foresee of what use he may be to the Church of God. Had Peter, when employed in fishing, been told what services he should render to the Jewish nation, or Paul what wonders he should effect in behalf of the Gentile world, how little would they have conceived, that such weak instruments should ever accomplish so great a work! The same may be said of others in later times: and so far is the weakness of the instrument from affording any just ground for discouragement, that God has expressly "committed the Gospel treasure to earthen vessels, on purpose that the excellence of the power may the more clearly appear to be of God:" and it still is, as it has ever been, his delight to "ordain strength in the mouth of babes and sucklings."

Think then, ye who have tasted any thing of redeeming love, is it possible that ye may be useful in promoting the designs, and in advancing the glory of your Lord and Saviour, and will ye not do it? Shall any earthly interests or attachments prevail with you to put your light under a bushel, when, by suffering it to shine forth, you might aid others in their way to heaven? O! requite not thus your heavenly Benefactor, but join yourselves to his people without delay, and live henceforth altogether for Him who lived and died for you.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who have never yet contemplated the invitation given them—

[Our blessed Lord, both in the Old and New Testament, says, "Look unto me," "come unto me," "follow me." But yet, strange as it may appear, we for the most part consider these invitations no more than a mere empty sound; or, if we regard them at all, we satisfy ourselves with vain excuses for refusing them. But, if we wonder at Hobab for proposing to

[u] ver. 31.

go back, after all that he had seen and heard, what shall be said of us, if we resist all the gracious invitations of the Gospel, after all that we have seen and heard in the New Testament? He was a Midianite by birth and by profession too, whereas we name the name of Christ, and profess ourselves his followers. Let us remember, that the invitation, rejected once, may be lost for ever; and that the Master of the feast, when he hears your vain excuses, may send his invitations to others, and decree that you "shall never taste of his supper."]

2. Those who having once accepted it are disposed to turn back—

[Many such we read of in the Scriptures; and many such we behold amongst ourselves. But, if any who are here present be halting, we would ask them, "To whom will ye go?" Where, but in Christ Jesus, will ye find the words of eternal life[x]? You have not forgotten Lot's wife, or the judgments that overtook her for only looking back to the city whence she had escaped: nor can you reasonably doubt but that they who turn back, "turn back unto perdition[y]." I charge you then, Be steadfast; and harbour not so much as a thought of "returning with the dog to his vomit, and with the sow that was washed to the wallowing in the mire." "If, after you have once escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, you are again entangled therein and overcome, your last end will be worse with you than your beginning[z]." Do not, like Orpah, kiss, and part; but, like Ruth, be steadfast in cleaving to the Lord[a]. Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."]

3. Those who, having given themselves up to Christ, are cleaving to him with full purpose of heart—

[You have doubtless met with some trials in your way, and been called to make some sacrifices: for where was there ever a true follower of Christ who had not his cross to bear? Then I will ask you, Have you ever had cause to regret any sacrifice you made for him? He has said, that "if any man leave father and mother, and house and lands, for His sake and the Gospel's, he shall receive an hundred-fold more in this life; and in the world to come, eternal life[b]." Is not this true? Have you not found it to be so by actual experience? Go on, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." Only, with Caleb, "follow the Lord fully," and you shall with him assuredly obtain a blessed portion in the promised land. "Faithful is He that hath called you; who also will do it."]

[x] John vi. 67, 68. [y] Heb. x. 39. [z] 2 Pet. ii. 20.
[a] Ruth i. 14, 17. [b] Mark x. 29, 30.

## CXLIX.

### MOSES' PRAYER AT THE REMOVAL AND RESTING OF THE ARK.

Numb. x. 35, 36. *And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.*

PATRIOTISM, according to the general acceptation of the term, consists in such a partial regard for our native land, as would advance the interests of one's own country at the expense of all others, and trample upon the most sacred rights of justice for the attainment of its ends. In this view, it is no better than a specious cloak for cruelty and oppression: but, when freed from selfishness and injustice, it is a good principle, and nearly allied to religion itself. Such was the patriotism of Moses: he wished well to his own country, and sought to promote its best interests. That he sought to occupy the territory of others, is true: but his right to their land was founded on the grant of Jehovah himself, the great Proprietor of heaven and earth: and his desire to possess it originated, not in a thirst for dominion, but in a persuasion that the possession of it was combined with spiritual blessings, and would tend as much to the advancement of God's honour as of Israel's good. He wished ill to none, any further than as they were enemies of Almighty God: it was their opposition to HIM which he prayed to be rendered ineffectual. All his desire was, that Israel might be happy in their God, and in the ultimate possession of those privileges which God, in his sovereign mercy, had destined them to enjoy. This was the one object for which he prayed, whenever the ark removed, and whenever it became stationary. And from this prayer of his we may learn, what we also should do,

I. In times of trial—

It is not to be expected that we should pass through this wilderness without meeting with manifold trials in our way. The Church of old had much to con-

tend with; and so must every individual that advances towards the heavenly Canaan — — — But our help is in God: and to Him we must look,

1. In earnest prayer—

[Prayer is the appointed means of obtaining succour from above: and it shall prevail when urged with fervent importunity — — — The uplifted hands of Moses prevailed against Amalek more than Joshua's sword: nor can we doubt but that, in all their journeys, the Israelites owed much of their safety to his continual intercession. Without prayer the whole Christian armour would leave him open to the assaults of his enemies: but, with it, he is altogether invincible — — —]

2. In humble trust—

[However numerous or powerful our enemies may be, we must remember, that "He who dwelleth on high is mightier." "If He be for us, none can with any effect be against us." With His help "a worm shall thresh the mountains" — — — It is manifest that Moses never doubted for a moment the all-sufficiency of Jehovah: nor should we: but, like David in the most perilous circumstances, we should banish all unbelieving fears with this thought, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven" — — —]

3. In confident expectation—

[Moses did not pray as to an unknown God, but as to a God whom by experience he knew to be "abundant in goodness and truth." Thus we should have our expectations raised: we should ask in faith, persuaded and assured that "God will do more for us than we can either ask or think" — — — If we were "not straitened in ourselves," we should not find ourselves straitened in our God.]

Similar to this should be our conduct,

II. In seasons of rest—

There were even in the apostolic age some seasons when "the Churches had rest:" and there are times of comparative rest which the saints experience in every age. But these are pregnant with danger to the soul no less than times of trial. At those seasons we are apt to relax our vigilance, and to be "settled on our lees." It becomes us therefore, *then* more especially, to seek the presence of our God; to seek it,

1. As our only safeguard—

[Moses never deemed himself secure but under the divine protection. Hence he was as anxious to have God present with

his people in their resting-places, as in their removals. We too, though apparently in peace, must remember, that "the roaring lion which seeketh to devour us" never rests; he is ever going about, and ready to "take advantage of us" to our ruin. In God, and in him alone, is our safety. If He guide us, we shall not err: if He uphold us, we shall not fall: if He be a wall of fire round about us, we may bid defiance to all the assaults of earth and hell — — —]

2. As our supreme happiness—

[At no time should we suffer ourselves to rest in created enjoyments: they are then only conducive to real happiness, when we can enjoy God in them. All, without him, is but "as the crackling of thorns under a pot" — — — To have his presence in the ordinances, and in the closet, and in our own hearts, *this* is life, *this* is peace, *this* is "joy that is unspeakable and glorified." *This* therefore we should covet beyond all created good; and every moment that we are bereft of *this*, we should consider as lost to all the great ends and purposes of life — — —]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who are ignorant of God—

[Do not despise the idea of communion with God: there is a time coming, when you yourselves will wish for it. A dying man is a pitiable object indeed without the divine presence. But if we seek it not *now*, what reason have we to expect it in a dying hour? — — —]

2. Those who indulge unbelieving fears respecting him—

[How greatly do you dishonour the God of Israel! See how he attended his people of old, going before them in their journeys, and abiding with them in their resting-places: and is he not the same God still? O blush and be ashamed, that ever ye have limited his power and grace. Only live nigh to him in the exercise of faith and prayer, and you cannot but be happy in time and in eternity.]

3. Those who enjoy his presence—

[Be, like Moses, true patriots. Consider "the many thousands of Israel," and let them ever have a remembrance in your prayers. Seek for them, as well as for yourselves, God's blessing and protection. To be intercessors for the Church is an employment worthy the attention of the highest potentates: at the same time "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man," however low he be in the scale of society, "availeth much." And they who bring down blessings on the Church by prayer, shall be sure to have no small portion of them resting on their own souls.]

## CL.

### INORDINATE DESIRE PUNISHED.

Numb. xi. 10—13. *Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: And the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly: Moses also was displeased. And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burthen of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, (as a nursing father beareth the sucking child,) unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.*

TRULY humiliating are the views which the Scripture gives us of human instability. Who would have thought that the zeal which all the princes of Israel manifested in furnishing the tabernacle[a] should so soon vanish? The first journey which they have to perform, fills them all with discontent: it being continued three days without intermission, all complain of the length of the way. Some are signally punished by the Lord, being struck dead by fire: but the survivors, neither awed by the judgments inflicted on others, nor won by the mercy shewn to themselves, soon murmur again for want of variety in their food. At this, Moses is deeply grieved, and God is greatly offended. That the different circumstances may come easily under our review, we shall notice in succession,

I. The sin of Israel—

They were discontented with the food which God had given them—

[They wanted flesh to eat, that they might gratify their palates; and were so vexed for want of it as to "weep in all their tents." To excuse these inordinate desires, they complained, that they were emaciated by subsisting only on such insipid food as God had provided for them[b]. They invidiously compared their state in Egypt with their present state; omitting all which they had suffered there, and magnifying the

[a] Numb. vii. [b] ver. 6.

comforts which they had there enjoyed — — — Thus they misrepresented both their past and present condition, that they might the better conceal their ingratitude, and justify their complaints.]

This was nothing less than a contempt of God himself[c]—

[What had not God done for them? What more could he have done? He had brought them out of Egypt with a high hand; and had overwhelmed their enemies in the Red Sea: he had been their Guide and Protector in all their way: he had given them bread from heaven, and water out of the rock: had revealed unto them his will, and taken them into a peculiar relation to himself above all the people upon the face of the earth; and yet, all that he had done was accounted as nothing, because they wanted flesh to eat. Is it possible to conceive a greater contempt of God than this? — — —]

Such a sin is discontent, in whomsoever it is found—

[There are many things in this world which a discontented mind will pant after or regret. But the indulging of such a disposition is rebellion against the Sovereign Disposer of all events; yea, it is an utter contempt of him. What! is it not sufficient to have God for our Father, Christ for our Saviour, the Spirit for our Comforter, and heaven for our everlasting inheritance, but must we murmur and complain because all temporal circumstances are not to our mind? What signifies any temporal want or loss, when we have such unsearchable riches secured to us? In comparison of such blessings, the greatest of earthly comforts is no more than the dust upon the balance. But this, alas! we are too apt to forget: we are ready, like the Israelites, to overlook all the mercies we enjoy, through an excessive regret of something lost, or an inordinate desire of something unpossessed.]

When we reflect on the exceeding baseness of this conduct, we shall not wonder at,

II. The grief of Moses—

We cannot altogether approve of the manner in which Moses expressed his sorrow—

[He not only complained *to* God, but in reality complained *of* God himself. God had appointed him to lead that people to the land of Canaan. This should have been considered by him as a singular honour: but he complained of it as a burthen. Not that he would ever have complained of it, if the

[c] ver. 20. "Ye have *despised* the Lord," &c.

## CL.

### INORDINATE DESIRE PUNISHED.

Numb. xi. 10—13. *Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: And the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly: Moses also was displeased. And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burthen of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, (as a nursing father beareth the sucking child,) unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.*

TRULY humiliating are the views which the Scripture gives us of human instability. Who would have thought that the zeal which all the princes of Israel manifested in furnishing the tabernacle[a] should so soon vanish? The first journey which they have to perform, fills them all with discontent: it being continued three days without intermission, all complain of the length of the way. Some are signally punished by the Lord, being struck dead by fire: but the survivors, neither awed by the judgments inflicted on others, nor won by the mercy shewn to themselves, soon murmur again for want of variety in their food. At this, Moses is deeply grieved, and God is greatly offended. That the different circumstances may come easily under our review, we shall notice in succession,

I. The sin of Israel—

They were discontented with the food which God had given them—

[They wanted flesh to eat, that they might gratify their palates; and were so vexed for want of it as to "weep in all their tents." To excuse these inordinate desires, they complained, that they were emaciated by subsisting only on such insipid food as God had provided for them[b]. They invidiously compared their state in Egypt with their present state; omitting all which they had suffered there, and magnifying the

[a] Numb. vii. [b] ver. 6.

comforts which they had there enjoyed———Thus they misrepresented both their past and present condition, that they might the better conceal their ingratitude, and justify their complaints.]

This was nothing less than a contempt of God himself[c]—

[What had not God done for them? What more could he have done? He had brought them out of Egypt with a high hand; and had overwhelmed their enemies in the Red Sea: he had been their Guide and Protector in all their way: he had given them bread from heaven, and water out of the rock: had revealed unto them his will, and taken them into a peculiar relation to himself above all the people upon the face of the earth; and yet, all that he had done was accounted as nothing, because they wanted flesh to eat. Is it possible to conceive a greater contempt of God than this?———]

Such a sin is discontent, in whomsoever it is found—

[There are many things in this world which a discontented mind will pant after or regret. But the indulging of such a disposition is rebellion against the Sovereign Disposer of all events; yea, it is an utter contempt of him. What! is it not sufficient to have God for our Father, Christ for our Saviour, the Spirit for our Comforter, and heaven for our everlasting inheritance, but must we murmur and complain because all temporal circumstances are not to our mind? What signifies any temporal want or loss, when we have such unsearchable riches secured to us? In comparison of such blessings, the greatest of earthly comforts is no more than the dust upon the balance. But this, alas! we are too apt to forget: we are ready, like the Israelites, to overlook all the mercies we enjoy, through an excessive regret of something lost, or an inordinate desire of something unpossessed.]

When we reflect on the exceeding baseness of this conduct, we shall not wonder at,

II. The grief of Moses—

We cannot altogether approve of the manner in which Moses expressed his sorrow—

[He not only complained *to* God, but in reality complained *of* God himself. God had appointed him to lead that people to the land of Canaan. This should have been considered by him as a singular honour: but he complained of it as a burthen. Not that he would ever have complained of it, if the

[c] ver. 20. "Ye have *despised* the Lord," &c.

to have little with a devout spirit, than abundance, and "leanness of soul withal." God shewed that it was not from any want of power that he did not feed them every day with flesh; but because he knew that it would be productive of no good to their souls. Think not that it is from any want of love or power that he suffers you to be tried in a variety of ways. He could easily carry you on without any trials, and give you all that the most carnal heart could desire. But trials are the fruits of his love: he desires to instruct you in every part of your duty; that you may "know both how to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." "Learn then in every thing to be content," and to say from your hearts in all things, "Not my will, but thine be done."]

3. Expect from God all that is truly good for you—

[Moses himself staggered at the promise, when God said, that all the people should feed on flesh for a whole month[l]: but God said to him, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not[m]." His promises to us also are "exceeding great and precious," both in relation to our bodies and our souls — — — Let us never presume to "limit the Holy One of Israel," as though any thing which he has promised, were either too great, or too good, for him to give. The trials which he sends us, are often sent on purpose that we may see the exceeding riches of his grace in our deliverance. For temporal things, let us depend entirely on his good providence; and for spiritual things, on his all-sufficient grace. In Christ Jesus there is a fulness of all that we can want; and "out of his fulness we may all receive" from day to day — — —]

[l] ver. 21, 22. [m] ver. 23.

## CLI.

### GOD'S WORD SURE.

Numb. xi. 23. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee, or not.*

IN reading the history of the Israelites, we cannot fail of being struck with the wonderful display of God's patience and forbearance towards them. No displays of love and mercy on his part would satisfy them. They were always murmuring, and wishing that they had never come out of Egypt at all. It was a small matter in their eyes that they were supplied with manna from the clouds from day to day:

they must have flesh to eat; and so intense was their desire after that gratification, that they actually wept before God, whole families of them, throughout the camp, saying, "Give us flesh, that we may eat[a]." Nor was Moses himself blameless in this matter: for though he did not in the least participate with them in their inordinate desire for meat, he questioned God's power to give them meat: and it was this unbelief of his which brought forth from Jehovah the reproof which we have just read, and which will be the subject of our present discourse.

In this reproof we see,

I. The evil of unbelief—

It is the most *common* of all evils—

[It pervades the whole human race. It is found in the godly, no less than in the ungodly. Even Abraham, the father of the faithful, was by no means free from it. Repeatedly did he desire his wife to deny her relation to him as a wife, and to call herself his sister, lest persons, captivated with her beauty, should kill him for the sake of obtaining an undisturbed possession of her; thus betraying his fears, that God was either not able to protect him, or not sufficiently interested in his welfare to watch over him. And Moses, on the occasion before us, was evidently under the power of unbelief. Some, indeed, would understand his reply to God as a mere question, and a desire to be informed whether the flesh which he would give should be that of beasts or fishes: but then the answer would have corresponded with it, and would merely have informed him that it was not the flesh of beasts or of fishes that he would supply in such abundance, but the flesh of birds. But Moses' question was evidently founded on the magnitude of the supply which God had promised. He had declared, that the whole people of Israel, not less than two millions in number, should be supplied with it, "not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but even a whole month, until it should come out at their nostrils, and be loathsome unto them[b]." To that, Moses in a way of unbelief, asks, How, when the fighting men alone amounted to six hundred thousand men, should they all be so fed as "to *suffice* them," (*twice* is that idea suggested,) and that "for the space of a whole month?" And God's answer to him clearly shews, that it was unbelief that was here reproved: "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" Thou hast

[a] ver. 10, 13, 18. [b] ver. 19, 20.

seen how easily I brought frogs and locusts upon the land of Egypt; and am I less able to supply flesh of any kind that I may see good? "You shall see *now (presently)* whether my word shall come to pass, or not."

When we see persons so eminent for the grace of faith as Abraham and Moses, yet giving way to unbelief, we need scarcely adduce any further proof of the universal prevalence of this evil. It exists, indeed, in very different degrees in men, being in some only occasional, whilst in others it is the entire habit of their minds: but there is not a man under the whole heavens who has not reason to mourn over the workings of this corruption, when he is brought into circumstances to call it forth. From other evils many persons may be accounted nearly free: but this works equally in men of every class, and every age.]

It is also the most *specious* of all evils—

[No one will avow a doubt of God's *power* to effect whatsoever he shall please: his pretext will be, that he cannot conceive how God should condescend to shew such extraordinary favour to one so insignificant and worthless as himself. But God himself never puts this construction upon it: he always regards it as a denial of his perfections, and resents it in that view. We have a remarkable instance of this in Ahaz. God told him, by the prophet, to "ask a sign of him, either in the depth or in the height above." But Ahaz, wishing to hide his unbelief, pretended that this was too great an honour for him, and that therefore he could not presume to ask any such thing: "Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." But was this construction admitted on God's part? No: He viewed the evil as it really was, and not as it was glossed over by this self-deluded monarch; and therefore, with just indignation, he replied, by his prophet, "Hear ye now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also[c]?" So, whatever we may imagine, a want of entire confidence in God, whatever be the circumstances under which we are placed, will appear in its true colours before God, and be condemned by him as unbelief.]

It is, moreover, the most *offensive* of all evils—

[There is no grace so highly honoured of God, as faith; nor any evil so reprobated by him, as unbelief. Other evils are acts of rebellion against his authority; but this rises against every one of his perfections. It doubts his wisdom, his power, his goodness, his love, his mercy; yea, it questions even his veracity; and reduces the infinite Jehovah to a level with his own creatures; insomuch that Balaam, when checking

[c] Isai. vii. 10—13.

the vain hopes of the king of Moab, could find no language more appropriate than this: "God is not *a man*, that he should lie; or *the son of man*, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good[d]?" What an indignity he considers it, is plain from his very answer to Moses: "Is the hand of the Lord waxed short? Thou shalt see whether my word shall come to pass or not." This is no slight rebuke: it is similar to that which he gave to Sarah, when she doubted whether she should ever bear to Abraham the promised child: "Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old? Is any thing too hard for the Lord[e]?" How Zacharias was reproved for his unbelief in the temple, you well know[f]. And amongst all the provocations which the Israelites committed in the wilderness, this was the one which God laid most to heart: "How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! Yea, they turned back, and *tempted* God, and *limited* the Holy One of Israel: they remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy[g]."]

Finally, it is the most *fatal* of all evils—

[Other evils, if we come to God in the exercise of faith, may be forgiven: but this evil, whilst it is yet dominant in the soul, precludes a possibility of forgiveness; because it keeps us from God, to whom we ought to come; and puts away from us that mercy which he offers to bestow. The whole adult population of Israel perished in the wilderness. What was it that prevented their entrance into Canaan? We are told, "They could not enter in because of unbelief[h]." And what is it which, under the Gospel also, is the great damning sin? it is this: "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature: he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned[i]."]

Whilst the answer of God to Moses reproves this evil, it points out to us,

II. Its proper antidote—

To prevent its ever gaining an ascendant over us, we should,

1. Reflect on God's power as already exercised—

[Had Moses only called to mind the wonders which God had already wrought for his people, he would not have "staggered at the promise" that was now given. Nor shall we doubt the certainty of any promise whatever, if we bear in

[d] Numb. xxiii. 19. [e] Gen. xviii. 12, 13. [f] Luke i. 20.
[g] Ps. lxxviii. 40—42. [h] Heb. iii. 18. [i] Mark xvi. 15, 16.

remembrance what God has already done. It is for this end that God himself refers us to all his wonders of *creation, providence,* and *redemption.* Of *Creation,* he speaks thus: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, *the Creator of the ends of the earth,* fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding[k]." So, in reference to his *Providence:* "Wherefore, when I came, was there no man; when I called, was there none to answer? Is my hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem? or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at my rebuke, I dry up the sea; I make the rivers a wilderness; their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst. I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering[l]." So also respecting *Redemption,* St. Paul expressly tells us that God's particular design, in converting and saving *him,* was, to shew to all future generations his power to save, and to cut off all occasion for despondency from the whole world: "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me *first* (in me, *the chief of sinners*) God might shew forth all long-suffering, *for a pattern* to them who should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting[m]." It is in this view that the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures is of such infinite benefit to the soul: for when we see what God has already done, it is almost impossible to doubt his power to effect whatever in his mercy he has promised to us.]

2. Reflect on his veracity, as unalterably pledged—

[When did God ever violate his engagements? His word has been pledged for many things; and has been questioned of mankind: but when did he abstain from fulfilling it? He said to our first parents in Paradise, "In the day that ye eat of the forbidden tree, ye shall die." No, says the tempter, "Ye shall not surely die." But whose word proved true? Satan's? or the Lord's? Again, to the antediluvians, God said that he would destroy by water every living creature, except what should be contained in the ark. During the building of the ark, the scoffers were lavish enough of contempt. But did God's word fail, either in relation to those who were to be saved, or to those who were doomed to perish? The destruction of Sodom, the captivities of Israel and Judah, the sending of the Messiah, the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world, furnished plenty of matter for doubt, before they were accomplished: but they all came to pass in their season, according to the word of God. For the

[k] Isai. xl. 27, 28. [l] Isai. l. 2, 3. [m] 1 Tim. i. 16.

captives who were restored to Judea from Babylon, it was said, "that if they would continue there, and be obedient to the king of Babylon, they should be preserved in peace and safety: but that if, through fear of the king of Babylon, they should flee to Egypt for safety, they should all perish[n]." And, when they would not be persuaded to remain there, but would go to sojourn in Egypt, the Lord sent this word to them: "All the remnant of Judah that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose word shall stand, theirs or mine[o]."

But, that we may depart as little as possible from our text, let us see the event of the prediction before us. God sent a wind; and brought such a number of quails, that they fell round about the tents of Israel, and filled the whole country for the space of one hundred and twenty miles in circuit, above a yard deep: so that the whole people occupied about six-and-thirty hours in collecting them; every one, even of those who gathered the least, collecting as much as eighty bushels for his own use[p]. Now it was seen "whether God could fulfil his word or not." It was seen, too, whether they had reason to repent of their inordinate desires or not: for "while the flesh was yet in their mouths, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and smote them with a very great plague[q]."

The truth is, that "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one jot or tittle of God's word to fail[r]." "He *cannot* lie[s]:" "he *cannot* deny himself[t]." He could as soon cease to exist, as he could falsify his word in any one particular. And, if we could only bear this in remembrance, we should never give way to unbelief, or doubt the accomplishment of any thing which the Lord God hath spoken.]

ADDRESS—

1. Those who doubt the fulfilment of God's promises—

[Who amongst us is not conscious of great defects in this particular? Who, in trying circumstances, has not found it difficult to cast all his care on God, as caring for him; and has not rather been ready to say with David, "I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul?" Who, whilst he has professed to call God his Father, has been able habitually to walk before him with the same confidence that a child places in his earthly father? Yet this is our duty: and it is a shame to us that we find the performance of it so difficult. But let us remember what a God we have to do with; how "merciful and gracious;

[n] Jer. xliv. 12,—14. [o] Jer. xliv. 26—28.
[p] ver. 31, 32. [q] ver. 33. with Ps. lxxviii. 26—31.
[r] Luke xvi. 17. [s] Tit. i. 2. [t] 2 Tim. ii. 13.

and how abundant in goodness and truth:" and let us "never stagger at any of his promises through unbelief; but be strong in faith, giving glory to God." And if, according to the views of *sense*, there be no hope, "let us against hope believe in hope;" and rest assured, that "whatever God has promised, he is both able and willing to perform."]

2. Those who question the execution of his threatenings—

[Men will dissuade us from regarding, as we ought, the sacred oracles; and will venture to place their own word in opposition to God's. Your own heart, too, will be apt to suggest, "I shall have peace, though I walk after the imagination of my own evil heart[u]." But what God said to Moses, he says to us: "Thou shalt know whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not[x]." Go on; listen to your carnal advisers; let them tell you that there is no need to give yourselves up to God; and that you may be the servants both of God and Mammon at the same time. Go on; and take their word in preference to God's; and wait to see "whose word shall stand, theirs or his." But remember, that if, unhappily for you, God's word shall take place, and that threatening be executed, there will be no room left for repentance: your state will be fixed, and *that* for ever. Choose ye, then, whom ye will believe, and whom ye will serve: and, if ye be truly wise, shut your ears against the assurances of an ungodly world, and say, in reference to them all, "Let God be true, and every man a liar[y]."

[u] Deut. xxix. 19, 20. [x] Ezek. xxiv. 14. [y] Rom. iii. 4.

## CLII.

### JOSHUA'S ENVY REPROVED.

Numb. xi. 27—29. *And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!*

EXPERIENCE proves that eminent situations are atttended with manifold anxieties; and that rulers, though envied by their subjects, often feel a weight of care which is burthensome in the extreme. Moses was supported in his office by God himself,

who confirmed his authority by many signal and miraculous interpositions: yet even he complained, "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me[a]."

To relieve him from the burthen, God promised, that he would pour out his Spirit upon seventy elders, whom Moses should select, and would qualify them for taking a share in the government. Two of the persons nominated, (being deterred, it should seem, by a sense of their own insufficiency for the office,) stayed in the camp, instead of going up with the others to the tabernacle at the time appointed. God however did not on this account withhold his Spirit from them, but gave it to them in the same manner as to the others: in consequence of which they began to prophesy in the camp. This innovation excited the jealousy of Joshua; who, fearing lest it should weaken the authority of Moses, instantly informed him of it, and desired him to forbid any further exercise of their gifts: but Moses saw through the hidden motives by which he was actuated, and checked the evil which had risen in his heart.

Let us consider,

I. The principle he indulged—

Doubtless, Joshua thought that he was acting under a good impression, and that his zeal was of the purest kind: but Moses traces his conduct to a principle of envy, which needed to be mortified and suppressed. Now envy is,

1. A common principle—

[Few are conscious of it in themselves; but all see the operation of it in their neighbours. There is not any evil in the heart of man more universally prevalent than this. "It is not in vain that the Scripture saith, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy[b]." We may see in Cain, in Joseph's brethren, in Saul, and in all the rulers of the Jewish Church, that this disposition is natural to man[c]. Infants at the breast have been seen to feel its malignant influence, when another has been permitted to participate what they have deemed their

[a] ver. 14. [b] Jam. iv. 5.
[c] 1 John iii. 12. Acts vii. 9. 1 Sam. xviii. 9. Matt. xxvii. 18.

exclusive right. There is no age, no situation, exempt. Even those who possess the most, as well as those who are wholly destitute, are open to its assaults — — —]

2. An active principle—

[Whatever is an object of desire, is also an object of envy: for envy is nothing but a regret that another should possess that which we ourselves would wish to enjoy. Usually indeed the things which persons most envy, are such as are proper to their own age or condition in life; and such as they think themselves in some measure entitled to. Those in whom beauty or strength is highly valued, look not with complacency on one who is reckoned to surpass them: nor do those who desire fame on account of mental qualifications, love to acknowledge the intellectual superiority of others. All are happy to hear their rivals depreciated, and themselves preferred. Nor is it respecting natural endowments only that this principle exerts itself: it shews itself no less in reference to acquired distinctions, of whatever kind. Riches and honours are amongst the objects which most powerfully excite this corrupt feeling: and it is difficult for any one to behold the more rapid advancement of his rival, and not to feel in himself some workings of this malignant disposition.

But this principle operates even where personal considerations appear very feeble and remote. The exaltation of a party, for instance, will call it forth in those who belong to an opposite party. There scarcely ever is a popular election, but the partisans of rival candidates are open to its assaults, as much as the principals themselves. Parties in the Church are no less agitated by this corroding passion, insomuch that they will endeavour to outstrip each other in things to which they have no real inclination, in order by any means to gain an ascendency for their own side. In the days of the Apostles, "some preached Christ of envy and strife;" and there is but too much reason to fear, that many also in this day have no better motive for their benevolent and religious exertions, than the strengthening and increasing of a party in the Church.]

3. A deep-rooted principle—

[One would suppose that religion should presently and entirely extirpate this principle: but it is not so easily rooted out. We find it working in persons who profess to have a zeal for God[d]; yea, in persons also of whose piety we cannot doubt. The disciples of John were alarmed for the honour of their master, when they heard that Jesus had more disciples than he[e]: and the Apostles themselves forbade a person to persist in the work of casting out devils, because he did not attach

[d] 1 Cor. iii. 1—4. [e] John iii. 26.

himself to them[f]. This was the very spirit by which Joshua was actuated: he was afraid lest the honour and influence of Moses should be weakened by others rising into popularity around him. Of course, this disposition is not wilfully indulged by any who truly fear God: but it is so rooted in the heart, that all have need to be on their guard against it.]

The hatefulness of such a principle may be seen by,

II. The reproof it met with—

Moses appears truly as a man of God. Behold, in his answer to Joshua,

1. His fidelity—

[He had a peculiar regard for Joshua: but that did not cause him to overlook his faults, much less to countenance him in what was wrong. Young men in general are apt to be led away by their feelings, and not to be sufficiently aware of their own corruptions. This was the case with Joshua: and Moses, like a father, watched over him with care, and reproved him with tenderness. Moses pointed out to him the principle by which he was actuated, and that higher principle by which he ought rather to be governed. It would be well if all religious people were equally on their guard, to check, rather than encourage, the growth of evil. If a person be of our party, and more especially if he be our friend, we are ready to receive his reports, without very strict inquiry, and to accede to his proposals, without sufficient care. Hence one person in a society sometimes diffuses throughout the whole a spirit of strife and contention, when, if the erroneousness of his views had been pointed out at first, the peace of the whole body might have been preserved. Great attention therefore do we recommend to all in this particular. More especially would we remind professing Christians of their duty; "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him[g]." We should not be contented with a specious suggestion. We should dread the incursion of an evil principle in the Church, as much as we do the introduction of fire in a place filled with combustibles. We should ever remember, that "a little leaven will soon leaven the whole lump."]

2. His zeal—

[The glory of God was that which was uppermost in the mind of Moses: and if that might but be advanced, he was quite indifferent whether his own honour were eclipsed or not. He well knew, that these two men "could have nothing except it were given them from above[h]; and that if God had

[f] Mark ix. 38. [g] Lev. xix. 17.
[h] This was John's answer; Mark ix. 39.

conferred on them the gift of prophecy, he would overrule the exercise of it for his own glory. Instead therefore of wishing to repress it in them, he would have been glad if every person in the camp had possessed it. What a noble spirit was this! how worthy of universal imitation! It was precisely thus that St. Paul rejoiced, when "Christ was preached of contention." He knew the motives of the preachers to be bad; but he knew that God would render their ministrations subservient to the increase of the Redeemer's kingdom: and therefore, however their conduct might affect his influence, he did, and would, rejoice[l]. Thus, beloved, should we be glad to see the Redeemer's interests advanced, whoever be the instruments, and whatever be the means. This consideration should be paramount to every other; and we should say, with John, "Let me, and my party, decrease, so that Christ and his kingdom may but increase[k]."]

3. His love—

[Moses had no desire to engross or monopolize the gifts of Heaven. As Paul said to his bitterest persecutors, "I would to God that all who hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds[l]," so did Moses wish all the people of Israel to have the Spirit of the Lord imparted to them, as much as he himself had. The more they were benefited, the more would his happiness be increased. This is that very disposition which St. Paul himself exercised[m], and which he inculcates on us, when he says, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others[n]." In fact, this is that principle, which, more than any other, counteracts the baneful influence of envy; "Charity envieth not[o]." Let universal love reign in our hearts, and, instead of envying any of our brethren, we shall be willing rather to "lay down our lives for them[p]."]

To IMPROVE this subject, we would recommend to you two things;

1. Examine well your own principles—

[Do not hastily conclude that your principles are right, even though you do not know that they are wrong; but search and try your ways, and maintain a godly jealousy over your own hearts. The Apostles themselves, on more occasions than one, "knew not what spirit they were of." Who amongst us does not see the blindness of others in relation to their principles? Pride, and ostentation, and vanity, and envy, and malice, and a

[l] Phil. i. 15—18. [k] John iii. 30. [l] Acts xxvi. 29.
[m] 1 Cor. iv. 9. [n] Phil. ii. 4. [o] 1 Cor. xiii. 4.
[p] 1 John iii. 16.

thousand other evils, are visible enough to others, when the persons influenced by them give themselves credit for very different motives. Doubtless, at times, this is the case with all of us. If indeed envy become in any respect a governing principle in our hearts, our religion is altogether vain[q]. Let us therefore watch our own spirits, and be thankful to any friend, who, like Moses, will "point out to us a more excellent way[r]."]

2. Take diligent heed to the word of God—

[The word of God, if duly attended to, would correct every bad principle in us. It is a two-edged sword, that lays open the inmost recesses of the heart[s]. To that St. Peter directs us, as the means of subduing envy, and every other evil propensity[t]. By the word the Apostles themselves were sanctified; and by that also must we be made clean[u]. Meditate then on that day and night: and let it be your earnest prayer, that it may dwell richly in you in all wisdom; and that, being cast into the mould of the Gospel, you may be "changed into the divine image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."]

[q] Jam. iii. 14—16. [r] 1 Cor. xii. 31. [s] Heb. iv. 12.
[t] 1 Pet. ii. 1—3. [u] John xv. 3. and xvii. 17.

## CLIII.

### AARON AND MIRIAM REPROVED.

Numb. xii. 8, 9. *Wherefore were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them: and he departed.*

WHEN men are angry, we may often, and with reason, doubt, whether there be any just occasion for their displeasure: but when we see Almighty God expressing indignation, we may always ask with confidence, "Is there not a cause?" It is no slight degree of anger which God manifests in the passage before us. And what could be the reason? We are told that "Aaron and Miriam spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married[a]." But this seems only to have been, if not a fictitious, at least a secondary, reason. (It must be strange indeed if they now began to be displeased with a thing which they knew to have been done many years, and which had never, in that instance,

[a] ver. 1.

been disapproved by God.) The true reason, I apprehend, was, that they were offended at his not having consulted them about the seventy persons whom he had selected to bear a part of his burthen with him: and it is possible enough that they might ascribe this to his wife's influence. They thought, that, as God had spoken by them as well as by Moses himself[b], Moses should have treated them with more respect. (This is precisely the way in which many, yea and good people too, are prone to act. If overlooked in any instance wherein they think they had a right to be consulted, they forget all the distinguishing honours which they already enjoy, and become querulous on account of the supposed slight which is cast upon them — — —) Of this complaint Moses took no notice; but meekly passed it over in silence. (Herein he shews how unreasonable murmurers and complainers should be treated. Would to God we were more like him in this particular! If querulous objections be met by passionate answers, contentions soon arise[c]; whereas silence, or "a soft answer, would turn away wrath.") But the less anxious we are to vindicate our own character, the more readily and effectually will God interpose for us. "He heard," though Moses was as one that heard not; and he immediately summoned the offenders before him, in their presence vindicated the character of his servant Moses, and smote Miriam with a leprosy: and though, at the request of Moses, he restored her to health, yet he ordered her to be put out of the camp for seven days; and thus exposed to shame the persons, who, through the pride of their hearts, had arrogated to themselves an honour which belonged not to them.

On account of the importance of these subordinate circumstances, we have dwelt upon them somewhat longer than usual. But it is not our intention to enlarge any more on them: we wish rather to turn

[b] Compare ver. 2. with Mic. vi. 4.

[c] The common history of quarrels is, that they begin like those of the ambitious disciples, and proceed like those of the jealous tribes. Matt. xx. 21, 24. 2 Sam. xix. 43.

your attention to the great and leading points contained in the words of our text. In *them*, God expostulates with Aaron and Miriam for presuming to speak against Moses. Now Moses sustained a variety of characters; in reference to which the words before us may be differently understood. As he was a *civil magistrate*, they shew God's anger against those who resist the magistracy. As he was a *teacher of God's word*, they shew how God is offended with a neglect of his faithful ministers. And, as he was *a representative of our great Lawgiver and Redeemer*, the Lord Jesus Christ, they shew what indignation God will exercise against those who either openly reject, or secretly despise, his only dear Son.

First then we shall consider them as expressing God's displeasure against those,

I. Who oppose the civil magistrate—

[Magistrates are appointed of God to bear a portion of *his* authority; and they are invested with it, that they may be a terror to evil-doers, and a protection to the good. To these we are to be subject, not reluctantly through fear of their displeasure, but willingly, and for conscience sake: and "if we will resist them, we shall receive to ourselves damnation[d]." Both temporal and eternal judgments must be expected by us if we rebel against the constituted authorities. Nor is it of open and avowed rebellion only that we speak, but of murmuring and complaining against them without just and great occasion. This was the fault of Aaron and Miriam; "they were not afraid to *speak against*" the person, whom God had ordained to be "king in Jeshurun." Persons of this class are invariably represented by God himself as enemies to HIM. "Presumptuous are they, says he, and self-willed, and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities[e]." They take liberties with earthly potentates, which the first archangel dared not to take with Satan himself[f]. It would be well if religious people were sufficiently on their guard respecting this. We have seen, during the French Revolution, great multitudes even of *them* drawn after Satan; and the supporters of civil government traduced by every opprobrious epithet: and though the generality of these deluded people have seen their error, yet the necessity for cautioning you on this head has not ceased. That the rights of people are very different in different countries, is certain; and that rulers *may* so conduct themselves, as totally to destroy

[d] Rom. xiii. 1—5. [e] 2 Pet. ii. 10. [f] Jude, ver. 8, 9.

the compact between them and their subjects, is also certain: but it is no less certain, that religious people, above all, should be "the quiet in the land," and should ever conform to that solemn injunction, "Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people[g]."]

## II. Who disregard the ministers of the Gospel—

[Those who minister in holy things are ambassadors from God, and speak to the people "in Christ's stead[h]." Their word, as far as it accords with the inspired volume, is "to be received, not as the word of men, but as the word of God himself[i]:" and whatever, in the name and by the authority of God, they bid you to observe, that you are bound to observe and do[k]. It is true, that ministers are "not lords over God's heritage[l]," neither have they any "dominion over your faith[m]:" yet it is also true, that in things pertaining to God they are invested with a divine authority: they "are over you in the Lord[n]:" they "have the rule over you, and you are to obey them, and submit yourselves[o]:" and if, while "they labour in the word and doctrine, they rule well, they are to be counted worthy of double honour[p]." What shall we say then to those who despise the ministers of God, and that too in proportion to their fidelity? This we must say, that "in despising us, they despise both Christ, and the Father who sent him[q]:" and their opposition to such ministers is felt by God as opposition to himself[r]; such opposition too as will meet with a dreadful recompence in the day of judgment[s]. What Moses had said and done, was by the direction and authority of God: and it was at the peril of the greatest people of the land to contradict and oppose him.]

## III. Who neglect the Lord Jesus Christ—

[Moses, as the head of the Church and people of God, certainly prefigured the Lord Jesus Christ. The very encomiums here passed on Moses by God himself, are such as of necessity lead our minds to Christ. Was Moses a prophet far superior to all others[t]? Christ is that Prophet of whom Moses was only a shadow, and whom all are commanded to hear at the peril of their souls[u]. Was Moses faithful in all God's house as a servant[x]? Christ is that Son who presides over his own house[y]. Was Moses the meekest of all men upon the face of the earth[z]? Christ is he whose unparalleled meekness is our

[g] Acts xxiii. 5. [h] 2 Cor. v. 20. [i] 1 Thess. ii. 13.
[k] Matt. xxiii. 2, 3. [l] 1 Pet. v. 3. [m] 2 Cor. i. 24.
[n] 1 Thess. v. 12. [o] Heb. xiii. 17. [p] 1 Tim. v. 17.
[q] Luke x. 16. [r] Zech. ii. 8. [s] Matt. xviii. 6.
[t] ver. 6, 7. [u] Acts iii. 22, 23. [x] ver. 7.
[y] Heb. iii. 2—6. [z] ver. 3.

great encouragement to learn of him[a]. In reference to Christ therefore, the expostulation in our text has tenfold weight. O, who must not be afraid to speak against HIM, or to entertain so much as a thought contrary to HIS honour?

Here then we have not to address the unbelievers; for they may well be classed under the former head: those who openly reject Christ, cannot even in profession obey his ministers. But many who are partial to faithful ministers, are yet far from being conformed to the mind of Christ. Many who are in high repute in the Church of Christ, have yet their unsubdued lusts, which rise in allowed hostility against their Lord and Saviour. The murmurs of Aaron and Miriam were not public; but "The Lord heard them." And so these vile affections may not be known; but God sees them: and he will, if we continue to harbour them, be "a swift witness against us" — — —

With what awful authority did he summon Aaron and Miriam before him[b]! But with a more awful voice will he call us forth to judgment. With what indignation did he, after reproving their iniquity, "*depart*[c]!" and will he not depart from such professors *here;* yea, and bid them to depart from him *for ever?* Did he expose their sin to all? Did he inflict a most disgraceful punishment? Did he order Miriam to be excluded from the camp of Israel[d]? Who reads not here the shame and misery of those, who, under a cloak of religion, have harboured any secret lusts? Were the most distinguished characters in the whole kingdom dealt with thus? Who then has not reason to fear and tremble? "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth. O kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way[e]." Behold, the sin of these two professors delayed the progress of all the hosts of Israel for seven days[f]! Armed hosts, or intervening seas, could not retard them: but sin, that evil and accursed thing, did what all the powers of earth and hell could not have done. O professor, think how many may be retarded in their progress towards heaven by one sin of thine; yea perhaps may be turned out of the way, and ruined for ever! Remember what our Lord has said, "Woe unto the world because of offences! but woe, most of all, unto him, by whom the offence cometh." It is on this account that God enjoined all his people to "bear in mind what he had done to Miriam by the way, after that they were come forth out of Egypt[g]." The Lord grant that none of us may ever lose sight of it! May we remember what an evil and bitter thing it is to lose in any degree the fear and love of God[h]!]

[a] Matt. xi. 29. [b] ver. 4, 5. [c] ver. 9. [d] ver. 10, 14.
[e] Ps. ii. 10—12. [f] Numb. xxii. 15. [g] Deut. xxiv. 9. [h] Jer. ii. 19.

ADDRESS—

[To those who have sinned in any of the foregoing particulars, we would particularly recommend, that, like Aaron, they confess their sin humbly, and without delay[i]. Yea, entreat that very Saviour whose authority you have despised, to intercede for you. Seek an interest in him: implore forgiveness for his sake: so will God "pardon your offences, though he may take vengeance of your inventions[k]." "Turn with unfeigned sorrow from your transgressions; so your iniquity shall not be your ruin." Leprous as ye are, ye shall yet be healed: and, deserving as ye are to be expelled from the camp of Israel, ye shall yet be received into it, and, through the tender mercy of your God, shall proceed in comfort to the promised land.]

[i] ver. 11. [k] ver. 13, 14.

## CLIV.

### APOSTASY DEPRECATED.

Numb. xiv. 4, 5. *And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of Israel.*

THAT the journeying of the Israelites in the wilderness is typical of our journey towards the heavenly Canaan is so generally known amongst you, that I need not insist upon it[a]. That being kept in mind, you will at once see the bearing of my present subject on the solemnities in which you have been engaged. The Israelites had now arrived at the borders of Canaan: and they sent spies, one from every tribe, to search out the land. They all agreed respecting the fertility of the country: but ten of the spies represented the attempt to conquer it as altogether hopeless. This report discouraged the whole congregation; who bitterly bewailed their disappointment, cast severe reflections on Jehovah himself as having deceived and betrayed them, and proposed to make a captain over them and to return to Egypt.

[a] If this should be the subject of an Address to young people AFTER CONFIRMATION, this sentiment may be modified according to circumstances. But, if it be used on a common occasion, our baptismal engagements may be substituted for those that are here specified.

Let us consider the circumstances here recorded; and,

I. The proposal made by the people—

[The report given by the spies was very unfavourable: the cities were represented as impregnable, being "walled up to heaven;" and the people of such a gigantic stature, that the Israelites were no more than as grasshoppers before them. The climate, too, was represented as so unhealthy, that "the land ate up the inhabitants thereof[b]." Hence the people were led to "despise the land" as unworthy of their pursuit[c], and to despair of attaining it against such formidable enemies: yea, they impiously wished that they had died in Egypt, when the Egyptian first-born were slain; or in the wilderness, when God sent a plague among the people for worshipping the golden calf.

Under the influence of their unbelieving fears, they proposed to make a captain over them, and to return to Egypt, from whence they had come out. They judged this to be so wise a measure, that no one could doubt of its expediency: "Were it not better for us to return into Egypt[d]?"

And are we not likely to hear of similar proposals at this time? You profess now to have dedicated yourselves to Almighty God, and to be bent on the attainment of the heavenly Canaan. But are you prepared to encounter the discouragements which you will meet with in the way? You have promised, before God, to "renounce the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh;" but are you girt for the warfare, and ready to go forth, in the strength of Christ, against these mighty foes? What reports, alas! will you hear! The mortality amongst the Canaanites, which the spies represented as arising from the climate, was no other than that occasioned by the hornets, which God, *according to his promise*, had sent, to weaken the people of the land, and thereby to facilitate the entrance of Israel into it[e]: yet was that made an additional ground for desisting from the enterprise. In like manner, the very exercises of mind, whereby God weakens the corruptions of his people's hearts, and ensures to them a final victory over all their enemies, are urged, by ignorant and unbelieving men, as reasons for declining all attempts to secure the heavenly inheritance: and you will hear repentance itself decried as melancholy, and denounced as little better than a prelude to insanity. In addition to such obstacles from without, (for I confine myself to those which arise from *report only*, without

[b] Numb. xiii. 31—33. [c] Ps. cvi. 24. [d] ver. 3.
[e] Compare Exod. xxiii. 28. Deut. vii. 20. Josh. xxiv. 12.

noticing any from actual opposition,) will not your own hearts suggest, that to overcome such potent enemies, as the world, the flesh, and the devil, will be impossible, especially for persons so young, or so circumstanced, as you?

The result of such misrepresentations and misconceptions is but too likely to appear amongst you at no distant period. You will not in a formal manner actually appoint a captain over you, because every one can act for himself, without any combination with others; but that many of you will be like-minded, in relation to this matter, is greatly to be feared; and that you will even justify the measure as wise, saying, "Is it not better that we go back again to the world?"]

But let us turn our attention to,

II. The effect of that proposal on God's faithful servants—

["Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of Israel;" filled, no doubt, with grief and shame at so foolish and impious a proposal. What prospect could they have of succeeding in such an enterprise? Could they suppose that God would go before them; and cause the manna and the water to attend them in their retrograde motions, as he had done when moving according to his will? If not, without any enemy whatever, or any special judgment inflicted on them, they must all die of hunger and thirst in a few days. Or, supposing them to get back to Egypt, what would be their reception there? Would not the rigours of their bondage be increased by their vindictive oppressors to the utmost extent of human endurance? Granting that all their fears respecting the Canaanites were well founded, what could they suffer worse by manfully contending with them, than they would infallibly bring upon themselves by the measure they proposed?

But the impiety of the proposal was, if possible, still greater than the folly. What a contempt of the promised inheritance did it argue, when they did not deem it to be worth a manly contest! What a distrust of God, too, who had already shewn himself so mighty to save, and had engaged that not one of their enemies should be able to stand before them! What base ingratitude, also, did this express, when they could so soon forget all the wonders that God had wrought for them, and all the benefits he had conferred upon them!

We wonder not that Moses and Aaron, who were able to form a just estimate of their conduct, were so deeply affected with it.

And shall not *we* also fall on our faces with grief and shame, my dear young friends, if we see you forgetting the vows that are upon you, and turning back again, and abandoning those

glorious prospects which have just opened upon you? For, what can you gain by going back to the world? I will suppose you gain all that the world can give. What is it? What satisfaction can it all afford? and how long will you retain it? Or, supposing you could retain it ever so long, would it repay you for the loss of heaven? To what a state, too, will your defection reduce you! Of all the men who came out of Egypt, not so much as one was suffered to enter the promised land, except Caleb and Joshua, who continued faithful in the midst of this general apostasy. A fearful type and pledge of the doom that awaits you[f]! Hear what God says on this subject, in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "If any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him[g]." Ah! know of a certainty, that all who draw back, "draw back unto perdition[h]:" and "if, after you have escaped the corruptions of the world, through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, you are again entangled therein and overcome, your latter end will be worse than your beginning: for it would have been better that you had never known the way of righteousness at all, than, after you have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto you[i]." You have all doubtless heard of Lot's wife, who, though brought out of Sodom, was turned into a pillar of salt, because she looked back towards the city, when she should have thought of nothing but of pressing onward to the destined place of refuge. Ah! "remember Lot's wife[k]," as our blessed Lord has warned you; for "if you only look back, after having put your hand to the plough, you are not fit for the kingdom of God[l]." How can your ministers, who have watched over you, contemplate such an issue of their labours, and not weep and mourn before God on your behalf[m]? I pray you, beloved, let not this be the recompence of all the pains we have bestowed on you: let us not have the grief of seeing that the very privileges you have enjoyed have only fitted you, like Capernaum of old, for a deeper and heavier condemnation: but let us have joy over you, in beholding your spiritual advancement; and let us have the sweet and blessed hope of having you for "our joy and crown of rejoicing to all eternity." Be not afraid of any enemies: for God is with you: "if *he* be with you, who can be against you?" Read the exhortation of Caleb and Joshua to their unbelieving brethren, and apply it to your own souls[n]: and, instead of listening to the ruinous suggestions of unbelief[o], "be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises."]

[f] Numb. xxvi. 64, 65. with Jude, ver. 5. and 1 Cor. x. 11.
[g] Heb. x. 38. [h] Heb. x. 39. [i] 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21.
[k] Luke xvii. 32. [l] Luke ix. 61, 62. [m] Jer. xiii. 16, 17.
[n] ver. 7—9. [o] Heb. iii. 18.

Let me, in CONCLUSION, address myself to the elder part of this audience—

[You must not forget, that the subject equally concerns you. For you also must "endure unto the end, if ever you would be saved:" and it is only "by a patient continuance in well-doing, that you can attain to glory and honour and immortality."

But that which I would particularly impress on your minds at this time, is the vast importance of your watching over the young people who have now consecrated themselves unto the Lord. Set them a good example yourselves; and do all you can to induce them to follow it. Take the part that Caleb and Joshua took on this occasion: strengthen their hands: encourage their hearts: tell them what a gracious and powerful and faithful God they have to help them in every time of need. Speak to them of "the land that floweth with milk and honey." Invite them to taste of "the grapes of Eshcol," which you have taken thence. Watch over the very "lambs of the flock, and carry them in your bosom." So shall all of us, ministers and people, rejoice together, and "have an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."]

---

## CLV.

### THE PEOPLE MURMURING AT THE REPORT OF THE SPIES.

Numb. xiv. 6—9. *And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them; and the Lord is with us: fear them not.*

WHEN actions originate in an evil principle, however specious they be, the motives from whence they proceed cannot long be hidden: a thousand things in the course of time will arise to elicit truth, and to discover the principles which we fondly hoped to conceal. The proposal of sending spies to search out the land, appears, from the first verse of the preceding chapter, to have been first made by God; but

in fact it arose from the Israelites themselves: the whole body of the people took a lively interest in it, and came, by their representatives at least, to request that Moses would accede to it. Moses, taking it as a symptom of their readiness to go and possess the land, was highly delighted with it[a]; and consulted God respecting it. God, knowing the thoughts of their hearts, and seeing that their faith in him was not so strong but that they needed to have it confirmed by further testimony, consented; just as the Baptist did to his diciples, when they wanted to ascertain whether Jesus were the Christ[b]: he bore with their weakness, and permitted them to seek conviction in their own way. But when the spies "brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched," the people instantly betrayed their unbelieving fears, and drew from Caleb and Joshua the remonstrance which we have just read.

That we may have a full view of the subject, we shall consider,

I. The remonstrance itself—

Let us examine,

1. The occasion of it—

[The spies who were sent, were twelve in number, one from every tribe. Of these, no less than ten agreed in representing the land as unconquerable. The inhabitants, they said, were giants, in comparison of whom they themselves were but "as grasshoppers;" and they dwelt in "walled cities" that were impregnable. They represented too the climate as so unhealthy, that "the land ate up its inhabitants[c]." (God had, *according to his promise*, sent either hornets, or some kind of plague, to destroy the people before them[d]; and *this* they turned into a ground of *dis*-couragement!) The goodness of the land indeed they could not deny; because they had brought such a sample of its fruits, as was a clear proof of its luxuriant fertility[e]. On hearing the report, the congregation gave way to utter despondency: they "wept the whole night:" they wished they had "died either in Egypt, or in the wilderness:" they complained that God had brought them thither *on purpose* to destroy them: they declared it would be better for them at once

[a] Deut. i. 22, 23. [b] Matt. xi. 2, 3. [c] Numb. xiii. 28, 31—33.
[d] Exod. xxiii. 28. [e] Numb. xiii. 23.

to return to Egypt; and they *actually appointed*[f] a captain over them, to lead them thither.

What "madness is there in the heart of man[g]"! Who would conceive it possible, that that whole nation should so soon forget all their past deliverances, and form so strange a resolution as that of returning to Egypt? This was an expedient more impracticable in its nature than the conquest of Canaan, and more dreadful in its consequences than death itself upon the field of battle[h] — — — Yet such is the effect of discontent: it magnifies every difficulty; undervalues every enjoyment; and rushes upon evils greater than those which it attempts to shun.]

2. The manner—

[The boldness of Joshua and Caleb, in opposing all their colleagues together with the whole congregation of Israel, was truly commendable. That it was at no little risk they ventured to remonstrate, is evident from the effect: for no sooner had they spoken, than all the people threatened to stone them; and would undoubtedly have carried their menace into immediate execution, if God himself had not interposed, by a signal manifestation of his glory, to restrain them[i]. But they would have accounted themselves happy to suffer martyrdom in such a cause. And this is the very courage which we also should possess. We should be witnesses for God in a degenerate world. We should never be deterred from testifying against sin, either by the number or authority of our opponents. If even we stood alone, as Elijah did, it would become us to maintain the truth with steadfastness, and to venture life itself in the service of our Lord.

Supposing these remonstrants not to be intimidated, we might expect them to be filled with indignation at the wickedness of the people, and to give vent to their feelings in terms of severity and reproach. But behold, they are penetrated with grief; and "rend their clothes" for anguish of heart: and in their whole address they exhibit a beautiful specimen of "the meekness of wisdom." O that there were in all of us such an heart! that we could weep over sinners, instead of being angry with them; and that we could "in meekness instruct them that oppose themselves," bearing with their frowardness, and pitying their perverseness! This union of fortitude and compassion is the very thing which we should labour to acquire, and which alone can fit us for reproving with effect.]

[f] This is not mentioned by Moses; but it is asserted by Nehemiah: Neh. ix. 17.

[g] Eccl. ix. 3.

[h] Could they expect God to follow them with miraculous supplies of bread and water; or their state in Egypt to be better than before?

[i] ver. 10.

3. The matter—

[Nothing could be more judicious than this address. The people had lost sight of God; and their faithful monitors set God before them. They acknowledge the existence of the difficulties; but they deny the inference deduced from it. True, say they, the people are mighty; but our God is mightier: their fortifications are strong; but not so strong that they can withstand God: the inhabitants fight only with an arm of flesh; we with the arm of the living God: What then have we to fear? they, how numerous or powerful soever, are only as "bread for us," and shall be devoured by us as easily as the food we eat. We have nothing to do but to trust in God; and we are as sure of victory, as if all our enemies were already slain. Let us go up then; not to *conquer* the land, but "to *possess* it:" the food is prepared for us; and we have nothing to do but to go up and eat it[k].

How encouraging was this! how calculated to carry conviction to their hearts! not one word to irritate, but every thing to convince and comfort them! This is the true pattern for reproof: as it should never savour of our own spirit, so it should never touch on painful topics but with care and tenderness: every syllable should breathe love. It is a proverb in France, that 'Flies are not caught with vinegar:' and we shall do well to remember, that it is the sweet alone which renders the sour palatable. Faithful indeed we must be, and so faithful as oftentimes to give offence: but we must take care that the offence arise, not from any needless severity on our part, but from the force of truth itself.]

Having noticed the remonstrance, it will be proper to consider,

II. The use we should make of it—

In the Epistle to the Hebrews (chapters iii. and iv.) the Apostle traces the correspondence between the events we are considering and the duties of Christians in all ages. He shews that Canaan represented the rest which remains for us; and he cautions us against falling short of it through unbelief, as that people did. Hence it is evident that the address delivered to them by Joshua and Caleb may with great propriety be made to us: at least, we may take occasion from it,

1. To excite your desires—

[k] Compare Numb. xiii. 30. with the text.

[Justly did these remonstrants, who themselves "had searched the land," declare it to be good, "an exceeding good land." And are there not those amongst us, who by faith have searched the heavenly land, and already tasted its delicious fruits? Is not the sealing influence of the Spirit said to be "the *earnest* of our inheritance[l]?" And may we not from the *first-fruits* of the Spirit which we have already received[m], judge in a measure what the harvest shall be? May we not at least take upon us to affirm that heaven is a good, an exceeding good land? Yes, truly, "it flows with milk and honey;" yet while it affords abundance to all, it gives satiety to none——— How can that land be otherwise than good, which was prepared by God the Father from the foundation of the world, purchased for us on the cross by the blood of his dear Son, and secured to us by the gift of the Holy Ghost, whose office it is to fit us for it, and to preserve us to it[n]?——— How can that be otherwise than good, which is emphatically called "Emmanuel's land[o]," as being the place where our adorable Saviour displays the full radiance of his glory, and communicates to every one, according to the measure of his capacity, all the fulness of his richest blessings?——— In whatever view we contemplate it, we cannot but see, that it is worthy of our utmost exertions, and will amply repay all that we can do, or suffer, in the attainment of it.]

2. To animate your hopes—

[Unbelief will say to us exactly what the people said to each other on this occasion; "Were it not better for us to return to Egypt? Let us make a captain, and let us return to Egypt." "When we were in the world, we enjoyed its pleasures, which now we have exchanged for pain and trouble. When we turned our backs upon the world, we imagined that we should experience nothing but ease and happiness under the protection of our God; but, behold, here are constant difficulties and trials to be encountered, and such too as we can never surmount: it were better therefore to return to our former state, and to leave events to God, who is too merciful to exclude any of his creatures from his heavenly kingdom." But, beloved, why should any of you be discouraged by your trials and conflicts? Have you not ONE on your side, who is able to make you "more than conquerors over all your enemies?" "If God be for you, who can be against you[p]?" Multiply the number and power of your enemies a thousand-fold, and you need not fear them. Only, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might[q]:" and know, that, though you are but as

[l] Eph. i. 13, 14. [m] Rom. viii. 23. [n] 2 Tim. iv. 18.
[o] Isai. viii. 8. [p] Rom. viii. 31, 37. [q] Eph. vi. 10.

a worm, you shall, through his almighty aid, be enabled to "thresh the mountains[r]" ———]

3. To direct your exertions—

[One caution did Joshua and Caleb give to Israel; which also we would recommend to your attention; it is, to *guard against an unbelieving and disobedient spirit:* "Only rebel not ye against the Lord." You have nothing to fear but sin. Nothing, but sin, can by any means hurt you. As for men and devils, so far from prevailing against you, they are only "bread for you," and shall, by the very efforts which they use to destroy you, be made subservient to your spiritual welfare. But sin is a deadly evil: *that* will provoke your God to depart from you: *that* may cause him to "swear in his wrath, that you shall never enter into his rest[s]." O put away from you that deadly evil! Especially put away unbelief: it is "by an evil heart of unbelief that you will be tempted to depart from the living God[t]." Pray therefore to God to "increase your faith[u]." Guard also against a murmuring spirit. If the Lord bring you into difficulties, it is only for the magnifying of his own grace in your deliverance. It is not your place to be indulging solicitude about events. God "would have you without carefulness[x]:" he bids you "be careful for nothing;" but to "cast all your care on him." Duty is yours: events are his. "Only therefore let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ[y]" and your success is sure: for your God has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."]

[r] Isai. xli. 14, 15. [s] Heb. ii. 11. [t] Heb. iii. 12. [u] Luke xvii. 5.
[x] 1 Cor. vii. 32. Phil. iv. 6. 1 Pet. v. 7. [y] Phil. i. 27.

## CLVI.

### GOD'S ANSWER TO THE INTERCESSION OF MOSES.

Numb. xiv. 20, 21. *And the Lord said, I have pardoned, according to thy word: but, as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.*

LITTLE do the world think how much they are indebted to the saints. They are the cluster for the sake of which the vineyard of the Lord is spared[a]; the elect, for whose sake the days of vengeance have been often shortened[b]; the little remnant, without which the whole world would long since have been made as Sodom and Gomorrha[c]. In the passage

[a] Isai. lxv. 8. [b] Matt. xxiv. 22. [c] Isai. i. 9.

before us we have this very matter exhibited in a striking point of view. The whole people of Israel were in a state of rebellion against God; and God was meditating their utter extermination. But Moses lifts up his heart in prayer for them; and, by his importunate intercession, averts the judgments which were ready to burst upon them.

Let us consider,

I. The prayer he offered—

This did not relate to the eternal salvation of the people, except incidentally and by remote consequence: it had respect only to the threatening which God had denounced against the people. Having reason to fear that God would "smite them all with a pestilence, and disinherit them" utterly[d], Moses entreated God to spare them, and urged such arguments as he judged most suitable to the occasion. These pleas of his deserve an attentive consideration.

He pressed upon the Deity,

1. A regard for his own honour—

["What will the Egyptians and the Canaanites say? Will they not ascribe the destruction of this people to a want of power in thee to accomplish thy projected plans[e]? O let them not have such cause for triumph! let them not have so specious an occasion to blaspheme thy name!"

This was an argument of great weight. He had used it successfully on a former occasion[f]; and God himself had acknowledged its force[g]. This therefore is a plea which we should use: we should use it with God, as an inducement to him to keep us[h]——— and we should use it with ourselves, as an incentive to vigilance and circumspection[i]. We should be exceeding tender of God's honour: and, when tempted to the commission of any sin, we should think, How will the Philistines rejoice, and the uncircumcised triumph[k]! how will they "blaspheme that sacred name by which I am called[l]!" O that I may "never thus give occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully[m]!"]

2. A conformity to his own perfections—

[d] ver. 11, 12. [e] ver. 13—16. [f] Exod. xxxii. 12.
[g] Deut. xxxii. 26, 27. See also Ezek. xx. 9, 14, 22, 44.
[h] Ps. v. 8. Jer. xiv. 21. [i] 1 Tim. vi. 1. [k] 2 Sam. i. 20.
[l] Jam. ii. 7. [m] 1 Tim. v. 14.

[Didst thou not, O my God, when proclaiming thy name to me, represent thyself as "long-suffering, and of great mercy, and as forgiving iniquity and transgression, though thou wouldest not clear the guilty[n]?" Let it now be seen that this is indeed thy character. I do not ask that thou shouldest "leave them altogether unpunished; but only that thou shouldest not make a full end of them[o], as thou hast threatened."

Here, methinks, is a plea, which, almost above all others, it becomes us to urge in all our supplications at the throne of grace. The character of God, as a God of infinite mercy, is that which encourages our addresses to him. When every other ground of hope fails, this is still firm. If only we do not "limit the Holy One of Israel," we can never be at a loss for "arguments with which to fill our mouths" at a throne of grace. O let us study well the representations which God has given of himself, and especially that to which Moses referred: then, even in our lowest state of guilt or misery, we shall never despair of obtaining mercy at his hands.]

3. A consistency with his own conduct—

["Thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now: and wilt thou abandon them at last? O let it not be so: pardon, I beseech thee, yet again and again their iniquity, according unto the greatness of thine unbounded mercy[p]."

This plea, if used with men, would have had no weight: it would have operated rather to prevent the repetition of mercies which had been so abused. But, with God, it availeth much: and in our minds too it is a most encouraging consideration. We may look back and see how God has borne with all our frowardness from our youth up to the present moment; and may take occasion from his past forbearance to supplicate the continuance of it: "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies, and thy loving-kindnesses; for they have been ever of old[q]." Yes; we should "account the long-suffering of God to be salvation[r]," and the goodness he has already exercised towards us as a motive and encouragement to repentance[s].]

Such was the prayer of Moses, a prayer peculiarly

[n] ver. 17, 18. which refers to Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7.

[o] That clause, "by no means clearing the guilty," may, both in Exod. xxxiv. 7. and in this place, be rendered "clearing, I will not clear," i. e. not make desolate. The word "*guilty*" is not in the original. In that sense it will be exactly parallel with Jer. xxx. 11. But the sense affixed to it in the Translation is probably the right, though the other is better suited to the purpose for which it is here adduced.

[p] ver. 19. [q] Ps. xxv. 6. [r] 2 Pet. iii. 15. [s] Rom. ii. 4.

excellent, because it was a holy *pleading* with God. Let us now proceed to consider,

II. The answer he obtained—

"I have pardoned," saith God, "*according to thy word.* Thou hast entreated me to spare them; and I will spare them: but, I swear by my own life, that the whole of my conduct on this occasion shall be such, as shall procure me honour to the remotest ends of the earth, and to the latest period of time. Every one of my perfections shall be now displayed: now will I exhibit before my people such rays of my glory, as shall illumine the benighted heathen, and fill the whole earth with wonder."

Now then, my Brethren, let us contemplate this subject with holy awe: let us beg of God to take away the veil from our hearts, that we may see wherein this glory of his consists. Let us behold,

1. His condescension in hearing prayer—

[Here was a whole nation involved in actual rebellion against God: and one single individual betakes himself to prayer. What, it may be said, can a single individual do? Read the answer of God, and see. He replies, not, "I *will* pardon," but, "I *have* pardoned:" "the very moment thou liftedst up thy voice, my hands were tied, and I could no longer persist in my resolution to destroy them[t]. I have pardoned *according to thy word*, and to the full extent of thy petitions." O, who after this will ever doubt the efficacy of prayer? If God answered so speedily the prayer of one on behalf of a rebellious nation, what will he not do for those who supplicate mercy for themselves? Will he ever cast out *their* prayer? No: let the whole universe know, that he is "a God that heareth prayer," and that not even the vilest of the human race shall "ever seek his face in vain."]

2. His mercy in forbearing vengeance—

[Consider the mercies which that nation had experienced, and the extent of that wickedness which they now committed; consider that they cast the most bitter reflections on God himself, and actually appointed a captain to lead them back to Egypt[u], and were proceeding to murder those who exhorted them to obedience: could it be supposed that *such* persons should be spared, spared too after God had said he would

[t] Compare Dan. ix. 20, 21, 23. [u] Neh. ix. 17.

instantly cut them off? Whom then will he not spare? Who, whilst on praying-ground, can be considered as beyond the reach of mercy? Let us not despair of any; nor let any despair of themselves: He is the same God as ever; "slow to anger, and of great kindness, and ready to repent him of the evil" which he has thought to inflict upon us, the very moment that he can do it in consistency with his own perfections.]

3. His justice in punishing sin—

[Though he forbore to destroy the nation at large, he executed immediate vengeance on those who were the leaders and instigators of the rebellion[x]. Nor were the people themselves left unpunished. They had expressed a wish that they had died in the wilderness: now God gave them their wish; and declared that not one of those who had rebelled against him should ever see the promised land. Forty *days* had been spent in searching the land of Canaan; and forty *years* were they condemned to bear their iniquities, till their carcases should be consumed in the wilderness.

What an awful lesson does this give to the ungodly world! Who must not tremble for fear of his judgments? Who does not see that it is vain to hope for impunity on account of the number of those who tread the paths of wickedness? The question is often confidently put by sinners, Do you think that God will condemn so many? We answer, If you would know what God will do, look at what he has done: inquire, how many of those who came out of Egypt ever were admitted into the land of Canaan: and when you have learned that, you will know how God will proceed in the day of judgment[y]. Let all the world hear this, and tremble: for "verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth."]

4. His goodness in rewarding virtue—

[Two of the spies were faithful to their God: and behold how God interposed for them! The congregation was just going to stone them, and God instantly displayed his glory in such a manner as to appal the hearts of their enemies. To them also he bore testimony, that they had "followed him fully:" and he promised them, that though every other man throughout all the tribes should die in the wilderness, *they* should go into the promised land, and enjoy the inheritance reserved for them[z].

Do any of the human race wish to ascertain whether their works shall be rewarded? Let them look to this history: let them here see how God will protect his people; and how

[x] ver. 36, 37.
[y] See 1 Cor. x. 11. Heb. iii. 17—19. and iv. 1. Jude, ver. 5.
[z] ver. 24, 30.

assuredly they who serve him in time, shall dwell with him in *eternity*. Surely none who hear these records will ever be afraid of being singular, or of bearing persecution for righteousness' sake. No: from henceforth every soul should be emboldened to "confess Christ before men," and to "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart."]

5. His faithfulness in fulfilling his word—

[Here was a strong temptation to rescind his promises: and indeed, because of the appearance of so doing, God says, "Ye shall know my breach of promise[a]." But the promise was not made to that people, that *they at all events* should inherit the land of Canaan: it was made to Abraham, that *his seed* should inherit it: and, both on this and a former occasion, when God threatened to destroy the present generation, he offered to raise up a nation from the loins of Moses, and to give the promised land *to them*[b].

God fulfilled his word in every point: and Joshua appealed to the whole nation of Israel for the truth of this[c]; as did Solomon many hundred years after him[d]. None therefore need to be afraid of trusting in God: for "he is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent[e]." Let the whole world be assured, that they may safely rely on him; that "not one jot or tittle of his word shall ever fail;" that "faithful is He who hath promised;" and that "what he hath promised he is able also to perform." Be it known therefore, I say, "that they who trust in him shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end[f]."]

6. His power to accomplish his own sovereign will and pleasure—

[The people had expressed their fears that their little ones would fall a prey to the warlike inhabitants of Canaan. Now, says God, "those very children, who ye said would be a prey, even them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised[g]." Weak as ye judge them to be, I will give them the victory; and not an enemy shall be able to stand before them.

Hear this, ye drooping, doubting Christians! let the whole world hear it: yea, let it never be forgotten, that "God ordaineth strength in babes and sucklings;" that "his strength is perfected in their weakness;" and that through him the weakest of us shall be "more than conquerors." Who weaker than Paul in his own apprehension? "I have not," says he, "a sufficiency even to think a good thought:" yet who stronger

[a] ver. 34. [b] ver. 12. with Exod. xxxii. 10. [c] Josh. xxiii. 14.
[d] 1 Kings viii. 56. [e] Numb. xxiii. 19. [f] Isai. xlv. 17. [g] ver. 31.

in reality? "I can do all things," saith he, "through Christ who strengtheneth me[h]." Let the weak then say, "I am strong[i]:" "let the feeble be as David, and the house of David be as the angel of the Lord[k]."]

APPLICATION—

[Behold now this glory of the Lord! see how it shines throughout this mysterious dispensation! see his condescension in hearing prayer—his mercy in forbearing vengeance—his justice in punishing sin—his goodness in rewarding virtue—his faithfulness in fulfilling his word—and his power to execute his sovereign will and pleasure! Let the whole earth contemplate it: let all transmit the knowledge of it to those around them; and assist in spreading it to the remotest heathen: let all expect the time when this view of God shall be universal through the world, and all shall give him the glory of his immutable perfections.

And, whilst we view the glory of God in his past works, let us *remember what will be the final issue of all his dispensations.* His glory will hereafter shine in still brighter splendour. When his answers to the prayers of all his people shall be known, how marvellous will his *condescension* and grace appear! When the sins of the whole world shall be made manifest, how shall we be filled with wonder at his long-suffering and *forbearance!* How tremendous will his *justice* and severity be found, when millions of impenitent sinners are cast headlong into the bottomless abyss! And when his obedient people shall be exalted to thrones of glory, how will his *goodness* and mercy be admired and adored! Then also will his truth and *faithfulness* be seen in the exact completion of every promise he has ever given; and his *power* and might be gratefully acknowledged by *all* whom he has redeemed, sanctified, and saved.

This then is certain, that in every human being he will be glorified. But the question is, How will he be glorified in *me?* will it be in my salvation or condemnation? In answering this question aright we are all deeply interested: nor will it be difficult to answer it, provided we inquire what our real character is. Do we resemble the unbelieving and rebellious Israelites, or those believing spies who "followed the Lord fully?" Vast was the difference between them, and consequently the discrimination will be easy. The Lord grant that we may "so judge ourselves now, that we may not be judged of the Lord" in that awful day!]

[h] Phil. iv. 13. [i] Joel iii. 10. [k] Zech. xii. 8.

## CLVII.

### FOLLOWING THE LORD FULLY.

Numb. xiv. 24. *But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.*

THE fewness of those who shall finally be saved is strongly declared in the Holy Scriptures; yet they who venture to suggest such an idea, are deemed uncharitable in the extreme. But it is not owing to a want of mercy in God that any perish: it is utterly their own fault: God delights to bless his faithful and obedient people; but the unbelieving and disobedient he will eternally condemn. The numbers that are found in either of these classes make no difference with respect to him: if there were only one or two ungodly, they alone should perish, and all others should be saved: but if a whole nation be ungodly, and only one or two of them be observant of the divine commands, those individuals alone shall find acceptance with him, and all the rest shall meet with their deserved doom. None but Noah and his family escaped the deluge: none but Lot and his daughters were delivered from the judgments which came upon Sodom and Gomorrha: thus, in the passage before us, we are told that Caleb alone, together with Joshua, was permitted to enter into the promised land, because they alone had followed the Lord fully.

To elucidate this record, and to bring it home to our own hearts, we shall shew,

I. When we may be said to follow the Lord fully—

The whole nation of Israel might be considered as followers of the Lord, because they had given up themselves to him as his redeemed people, and depended on him for guidance and protection. In the same manner the whole body of Christians may be called followers of Christ, because they profess to have been redeemed by him from the far sorer bondage of sin and death, and because they look to him, in profession at least, to guide them by his Spirit, to keep them by

his grace, and to bring them in safety to the heavenly Canaan. But as the great body of the Jewish nation deceived themselves to their ruin, so, it is to be feared, the greater part of the Christian world will ultimately be disappointed of their hopes. To follow the Lord will be to but little purpose, unless we follow him *fully*. Now this implies, that we follow him,

1. With unreserved cheerfulness—

[The Israelites at large were pleased with God's service no longer than while their inclinations were gratified to the full. As soon as ever they were called to exercise any self-denial, or to suffer a little for his sake, they began to murmur, and repented that they had taken his yoke upon them. Especially when they heard the report of the spies respecting the power of their enemies, they proposed to cast off God's yoke altogether, and to return to their former masters in Egypt. But Caleb "had another spirit with him:" he considered himself as altogether at God's disposal, and cheerfully obeyed him, as well in circumstances of difficulty and danger, as in the ways that were more pleasing to flesh and blood.

Now this disposition characterizes every faithful follower of Christ. It is not for us to choose our own way, but to follow the directions of our Divine Master. No commandment of his must be esteemed grievous; nothing must be called "a hard saying;" but we must cheerfully conform ourselves to every part of his revealed will, and account his service to be perfect freedom.]

2. With undaunted resolution—

[Caleb had seen with his own eyes what difficulties he should have to encounter in subduing the land of Canaan; yet was he not in the least dismayed: yea, his whole nation were so offended with his fidelity to God, that they gave orders that he should be stoned to death. But nothing could intimidate him: he knew the will of God, and he was determined to execute it at all events.

Thus the Christian whose heart is right with God, is not deterred by any difficulties from proceeding in the path of duty: he knows that the world will be against him; and he often finds his greatest enemies to be those of his own household: yet he determines to go forward, and to obey God rather than man. Like the Hebrew youths, if he behold a furnace prepared for his destruction, he will still hold fast his integrity, and submit to death itself rather than violate his duty to his God.]

3. With unshaken affiance—

[The report of the spies was doubtless very discouraging. The people whom they had seen were of most gigantic stature:

the cities in which they dwelt, were walled up to heaven: and it is probable that there was a dreadful pestilence at that time ravaging "the land, and swallowing up the inhabitants thereof." But Caleb had the promise of Jehovah to rest upon; and therefore he knew that he could not fail of success; yea, he was assured that, however numerous or mighty his enemies were, they should be "bread for the Lord's people," and be as easily crushed and devoured by them as a piece of bread.

In this also the faithful follower of Christ will resemble Caleb: he knows that Omnipotence is engaged in his behalf; and he rests securely on the word of God. If his corruptions were yet stronger than they are, and the world, with the confederate hosts of hell, were tenfold more powerful, he would not fear; "he knows in whom he has believed," and is persuaded that "He who has promised is able also to perform."]

The character of those who follow the Lord fully, being thus delineated, we shall proceed to notice,

II. The blessedness of those who do so—

Here also the history of Caleb will serve as our guide. The text informs us, that he received,

1. The approbation of his God—

[God confessed him before all Israel as "*his servant.*" What an honour was this, to be thus distinguished by Jehovah himself! And shall not every faithful servant of Jehovah be thus distinguished? Shall he not have an inward witness of the Spirit testifying of his adoption into God's family, and enabling him with confidence to cry, Abba, Father? Will not God "shed abroad his love in the hearts" of his people, and "seal them with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the earnest of their eternal inheritance?" And though no authentic declaration shall be made to others respecting his state, yet shall his very enemies be constrained to reverence him in their hearts, even though, like Herod, they should persecute him unto death.]

2. The completion of all his wishes—

[Doubtless Caleb earnestly desired an inheritance in the land of Canaan: and the very mountain on which his feet had trodden was assigned to him as his portion by God's express appointment. But he surely looked beyond an earthly inheritance: nor can we doubt but that he is distinguished in the Canaan above as much as he was in the earthly Canaan.

And what does the faithful Christian desire? What is the great object of his ambition, but to inherit that good land which the Lord his God has promised him? And shall he come short of it? Will not God preserve him unto his heavenly

kingdom? Yes: neither men nor devils shall deprive him of his inheritance: that very land, which by faith he has so often viewed and trodden, shall be given to him; and "all the seed of Caleb" and of Abraham shall have it for their everlasting portion. Behold, Christian, where Caleb now is, thou shalt shortly be: whatever difficulties may obstruct thy way, or whatever length of time may intervene, the period shall arrive, when He whom thou servest shall say unto thee, "Come, thou blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have never set themselves to follow the Lord at all—

[Think not that the Christian name will avail thee, while thou art destitute of the Christian spirit. Nor imagine that thou wilt be screened from divine vengeance by the number of those who are in thy condition: for there were but two out of all who had grown to man's estate, that were suffered to enter into the promised land: all the rest were excluded from it, that they might be an example unto us, and might shew us what we are to expect, if we give not up ourselves to the service of Christ. Let me then entreat you all to become followers of Christ, "not in word only, but in deed and in truth." Look to him, that you may experience the full benefits of his redemption. Trust in his blood to cleanse you from your sins: rely on his Spirit to guide you in his ways: and depend on his grace to subdue all your enemies before you. But if you still persist in your rebellion against him, know for a certainty that you shall never see that good land which you profess to expect as your eternal inheritance.]

2. Those who follow the Lord partially—

[A profession of religion may in a variety of ways conduce to the good of society, but it will never save the soul. We must follow the Lord *fully*, if we would find favour with him in the eternal world. It is no small matter to be Christians indeed. What Caleb was under the Law, we must be under the Gospel. The reason of Caleb's acceptance is marked repeatedly, in the strongest terms[a]. The reason too of the rejection of the others is marked in similar language, and with equal plainness[b]. And the example of those who perished is set before us by St. Jude, on purpose that the professors of godliness may be admonished by it[c]. O let the admonition sink deep into our hearts! and let us all be stirred up to diligence, that we may be found "Israelites indeed, in whom there is no guile!"]

[a] Josh. xiv. 8, 9, 14. [b] Numb. xxxii. 10, 11. [c] Jude, ver. 5.

3. Those who, like Caleb, are following the Lord fully—

[Fear not singularity in so good a cause. If you are singular in following the Lord fully, the fault is not yours, but theirs who presume to violate the divine commands. Go on then, though the whole universe should be against you. If God acknowledge you as his servants, you need not regard the censures or the threats of men. You are embarked in a good cause: you serve a good Master: you run for a good prize. The land of promise is before you. Press forward for the attainment of it: "Be faithful unto death, and God will give you a crown of life."]

## CLVIII.

### PRESUMPTION OF THE REBELLIOUS ISRAELITES.

Numb. xiv. 44. *But they presumed to go up unto the hill-top.*

THERE are principles in the human heart of which few people are aware. One in particular is, a disposition to withstand the authority of God, whatever his commands may be. We see something of this in children towards their parents: the very circumstance of a thing being enjoined makes them averse to it; and a prohibition immediately creates in them a desire after the thing prohibited. St. Paul represents this to have been his experience in his unconverted state: "Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in him all manner of concupiscence," and made him rise against the commandment, as water does against the dam that obstructs its progress. Such a disposition is not uncommon. There is scarcely any man, who, if he will examine carefully his own conduct, may not find, that he more readily does or forbears any thing in compliance with his own will, than when that thing is the subject of a prohibition or command. This perverse temper was very conspicuous in the Israelites when on the borders of Canaan. Being commanded, importuned, and encouraged to go up and possess the promised land, they could not be prevailed upon to go; but, when they were commanded to return into the wilderness, immediately they changed their minds, and would go against the

Canaanites, even in direct opposition to the will of God. This is called in our text, "*presumption:*" "they presumed to go up unto the hill-top."

Let us, for the elucidation of this subject, inquire,

I. Wherein their presumption consisted—

To believe the promises of God, and to expect the accomplishment of them to our own souls, is considered by many as an evidence of presumption. But presumption is rather the fruit of unbelief. That of which the Israelites were guilty consisted in two things;

1. They went up without the divine presence—

[God had told them that he would not go up with them: but they, who had just before despaired of success, even though God himself should fight on their side, now thought they could succeed by the unassisted efforts of their own arm. The folly of such a conceit we easily discern; but are little aware how universally it obtains in reference to spiritual combats. God offers to be with us, and by his almighty power to give us the victory. We persuade ourselves that we have a sufficiency of strength within ourselves, and that we can succeed without any supernatural assistance. Hence we neglect to implore help from God, we refuse to trust in him, and we go forth against our enemies in our own strength — — —

What is this but the very conduct of those rebellious Israelites? The only difference is, that they acted thus in reference to temporal enemies, and an earthly inheritance; whereas we do it, whilst we have all the powers of darkness to contend with, and no less a prize than heaven itself at stake.]

2. They went up in opposition to the divine command—

[God had expressly said to them, "Go not up:" and yet they would persist in their resolution. They would not go when they were commanded; but now will go, when they are forbidden. Doubtless they would attempt to vindicate their conduct, by alleging, that the rectifying of their former errors was the best proof of their repentance: and they would persuade themselves that God could never be angry with them for doing that, which he had just punished them for refusing to do. But vain were all such reasonings as these. Their duty was to obey, and not to put their reasonings in opposition to the divine commands. Yet in this we imitate them continually. We find, as we imagine, good reasons why this or that command is not to be obeyed; and then we follow our own will, in direct opposition to God's — — — But what presumption

is this! We do not like the way which God has prescribed for us to walk in, and we will go to heaven in our own way. This conduct we may attempt to justify; but God has stamped upon it its true character, as daring and impious presumption.]

To form a just estimate of their conduct, let us consider,

II. Wherein it issued—

They hoped, no doubt, that they should gain the victory: but their efforts terminated,

1. In painful disappointment—

[They found their enemies, as Moses had foretold, prepared for the encounter: and no sooner did they make the attack, than their courage failed them, and they fled; yea their enemies chased them "like enraged bees," and destroyed them even unto Hormah. This is precisely what they had reason to expect; and what must be expected by all who will presumptuously advance in their own strength. In fact, this is the very thing of which all who depend on their own arm complain. They will not go forward in dependence on the Lord, and in obedience to his commands; but will trust in their own fancied sufficiency to work out their salvation: the consequence is, that, after all their endeavours to mortify sin, and to lead a heavenly life, they cannot do the things which are required of them ——— Hence the general complaint, that they who preach the Gospel require of men more than they can perform. But in whom is the fault? Not in those who enforce plainly the commands of God, but in those who, rejecting the offers of God's all-sufficient grace, attempt to gain the victory by an arm of flesh.]

2. In fruitless sorrow—

[The fugitive hosts "returned and wept before the Lord: but the Lord would not hearken to their voice, nor give ear unto them[a]." Now they regretted their former disobedience, and prayed that the sentence denounced against them might be reversed. If God would but try them once more, they would do whatsoever he should command. But their doom was sealed: yea, in this very defeat, it had already been begun to be executed. Many were slain; and God had decreed that every one of them, except Caleb and Joshua, should die in the wilderness. Like Esau therefore, "they found no place of repentance, though they sought it carefully with tears[b]."

What an affecting representation is this of the final issue of disobedience to the world at large! When once their doom is sealed, how bitterly will they regret their past folly and wicked-

[a] Deut. i. 45. [b] Heb. xii. 17.

ness! O, if they could but have another opportunity afforded them, how gladly would they embrace it! how resolutely would they obey the voice of God! they would no more presumptuously prefer their own will and way to his, but would obey him cheerfully and without reserve. But in vain are all such desires: their sentence is irrevocably passed: and all possibility of attaining the heavenly inheritance is gone for ever. Nothing now remains for them but to "weep and wail and gnash their teeth" for anguish, and to die that death, that second death, which they were not careful to avoid.]

The subject will give me a fit occasion to ADDRESS,

1. Those who are afraid of presumption—

[Many there are who dread presumption, and who, through a fear of it, are deterred from applying to themselves the rich consolations of the Gospel: they think it would be presumptuous in such weak and sinful creatures as they to expect all the great things which God has promised to his people — — — But, be it known unto you that it is no presumption to believe in God, or trust in God, even though you were the weakest and the vilest of the human race. If indeed you were to profess a confidence in him, whilst you were living in wilful and allowed sin, that would be presumption: but, if you truly desire to devote yourselves to God, and to be saved by him in his appointed way, the deeper sense you have of your own unworthiness, the more assuredly shall you receive from him all the blessings of a complete salvation — — —]

2. Those who indulge presumption—

[Of those who determinately go on in their own way, we have already spoken: and therefore we shall pass them over with only entreating them to remember what they have already heard to be the issue of such conduct. But there are even amongst those who profess religion, many who are guilty of very great presumption. What is it but presumption, to run into needless temptations, in hopes that God will keep us? O that the worldly-minded would consider this, when they are grasping after preferment or gain! O that *they* would consider it, who mix so readily with carnal company, and conform so easily to the maxims and habits of a vain world! O that the impure and sensual would consider it, when they give such liberty to their eyes and tongue! Beloved Brethren, we must not tempt God: but, retaining a sense of our extreme weakness and sinfulness, we must watch and pray that we enter not into temptation. Let this then be our daily prayer, "Keep thy servant, O Lord, from presumptuous sins, lest they get dominion over me:" and "Preserve me blameless unto thy heavenly kingdom:" "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."]

## CLIX.

### THE DANGER OF PRESUMPTUOUS SIN.

Numb. xv. 30, 31. *The soul that doeth aught presumptuously (whether he be born in the land or a stranger), the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off: his iniquity shall be upon him.*

EVERY command of God is to be obeyed: and it is no excuse to say we were ignorant of the command. We know that there is a God to whom we are accountable: we know that he has given us a revelation of his will; and it is our duty to acquaint ourselves with all that he requires at our hands. Even in reference to human laws, it is no excuse to say that we were ignorant of them. We are supposed to be acquainted with them: and if we violate them in any respect, the penalty is from that moment incurred. A merciful judge may consider our ignorance as a reason for mitigating, or even for remitting, the penalty: but the law knows nothing of this: its enactments are valid; its sanctions attach on every one that transgresses them: and every one feels interested in upholding its authority. Thus it was under the Mosaic Law; even where the ordinances were so numerous, that they could scarcely be remembered by any, except those who were altogether devoted to the study of them. Yet, if any person transgressed through ignorance, he must, as soon as he was informed of his error, bring the appointed offering, in order to obtain forgiveness of his fault[a]; and, if he refused to bring his offering, he must be cut off, as a presumptuous transgressor. For sins of presumption, of whatever kind they might be, there was no atonement whatever prescribed. It did not become God to spare one who could deliberately set himself against his authority: and therefore it was expressly commanded that the presumptuous sinner, whoever he might be, should be cut off.

[a] ver. 27, 28.

To illustrate this subject, I shall shew,

I. The danger of presumptuous sin under the Law—

Presumptuous sin is not to be understood of every sin that is committed wilfully; but of those sins which, as the marginal translation expresses it, are committed "*with a high hand*:" such, for instance, as that of Pharaoh, when he set himself directly against God, saying, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go." It is such also as David characterizes under the following terms: "The tongue that speaketh proud things; namely, of those who have said, With our tongue will we prevail: our lips are our own: who is Lord over us[b]?"

The person committing this sin was doomed to death. No sacrifice was appointed for him: whatever injunction it was that he thus determinately opposed, whether it belonged to the ceremonial or moral law, he must suffer death for his offence. It is probable that the sentence executed, by God's own command, against the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath-day was intended to illustrate this. His offence might appear but slight; namely, gathering sticks on the Sabbath-day: but, as it was done in a known and avowed contempt of the divine will, he must be stoned to death[c].

Now, how can it be accounted for, that so severe a judgment should be executed for doing any thing presumptuously? It was considered as reproaching, and pouring contempt on, God himself;

1. As unreasonable in his commands—

[A man who sets himself avowedly against any command, does, in fact, complain of that command as unreasonable and unjust. A man, through infirmity, may fall short in his obedience, whilst he acknowledges that the law which he violates is holy and just and good; but if he set himself against the command itself, it must, of necessity, be from an idea that it imposes an unnecessary restraint, or, at all events, that it may well be dispensed with for his convenience.]

2. As weak in his threatenings—

[b] Ps. xii. 3, 4. [c] ver. 32—36.

[No one who could form the least idea what "a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God" would despise his threatenings. But there is a vague notion in the minds of men, that God will never execute them. Thus David describes these poor deluded men: "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts: Thy ways are always grievous: thy judgments are far above, out of his sight: as for all his enemies, *he puffeth at* them[d]." Would it be right for God to bear such an indignity as this?]

3. As altogether unworthy of any serious regard—

[Were the mind duly impressed with any of the perfections of the Deity, we could not possibly treat him with such contempt. His power and majesty would awe us into fear; his love and mercy would engage our admiration: and though we might still be far from that entire submission to his will which he requires, it would not be possible for us to set ourselves in array against him, and to "run upon the thick bosses of his buckler[e]."

Conceive, then, of a creature thus rising against his Creator, and you will readily see why presumptuous sin should be thus severely punished.]

But let us proceed to mark,

II. The still greater danger of it under the Gospel—

True it is, that under the Gospel we have a sacrifice for presumptuous sins as well as others: but if the Gospel be the object of our contemptuous disregard, we cannot possibly be saved, but must perish under a most accumulated condemnation.

1. Because a contempt of the Gospel is in itself more heinous than a contempt of the Law—

[The Law contained innumerable ordinances, the reason of which, few, if any, could comprehend: and St. Paul, in comparison of the Gospel, calls them "weak and beggarly elements." But the Gospel is the most perfect display of God's wisdom and goodness that ever he revealed to mortal man. It exhibits the works and offices of the Lord Jesus Christ, together with the gracious influences of the Spirit: and, if they be despised by us, there can be no hope. For thus saith the Lord: "He that despised Moses' Law, died without mercy, under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of

[d] Ps. x. 4, 5. [e] Job xv. 25, 26.

the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace[f]?"]

2. Because a contempt of the Gospel is, in fact, a rejection of the only means whereby sin can be forgiven—

[Whither shall a man flee, who rejects the Saviour? "What other sacrifice for sin" will he ever find, or what other "way to the Father?" Well does the Apostle say, "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries[g]." Eli's reproof to his sons puts this matter in the clearest light: "If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, in despising his sacrifices, who shall entreat for him[h]?"]

APPLICATION—

1. Be thankful, then, that ye live under the Gospel—

[To *you* "all manner of sin and blasphemy may be forgiven." How presumptuous soever your past iniquities may have been, they may all be "blotted out as a morning cloud," and "cast into the very depths of the sea." This could not be so confidently spoken under the Law of Moses: but to you I declare it with confidence, that "the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse from all sin[i];" and that "all who will believe in him shall be justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the Law of Moses[k]."]

2. Be earnest in prayer with God, that, whatever means he may find it expedient to use, he would keep you from presumptuous sin—

[This was David's course: "Keep thy servant from presumptuous sins: let them not have dominion over me: so shall I be upright, and innocent from the great offence[l]." Be assured you need to use this prayer, and will need it to your dying hour. David's attainments were great: yet he felt the need of crying continually, "Hold thou me up, that my footsteps slip not." So do ye continually: and you may then hope that God will "keep you from falling, and present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy[m]."]

[f] Heb. x. 28, 29. [g] Heb. x. 26, 27. [h] 1 Sam. ii. 25.
[i] 1 John i. 7. [k] Acts xiii. 39. [l] Ps. xix. 13.
[m] Jude, ver. 24, 25.

## CLX.

### THE SABBATH-BREAKER STONED.

Numb. xv. 32—36. *And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath-day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation: and they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.*

IN great communities, instances of flagrant transgression will occur; nor can any mercies or judgments from God prevent them. Nothing but divine grace can keep individuals in the path of duty. The presumption of those, who, in opposition to the divine command, had gone up to the hill-top to engage the Canaanites, had been severely punished: and though God had since given instructions respecting the particular offerings which should at a future period be presented for sins of ignorance, he had expressly declared, that presumptuous sins should be punished with death; and that no offering whatever should be accepted for them[a]. Yet, behold, scarcely had this declaration been given, before a man was found profaning the Sabbath-day: for which offence he was made a signal monument of divine vengeance.

His crime and punishment, which are specified in the text, lead us to notice the guilt and danger of profaning the Sabbath. Let us consider,

I. The guilt—

According to the estimate of mankind in general, the profanation of the Sabbath is but a slight offence: but, in fact, it is a very heinous sin. It is,

1. An unreasonable sin—

[Consider who it is that requires the observation of the Sabbath. It is that God who made us, and endowed us with all our faculties, and upholds us every moment, maintaining

[a] ver. 30, 31.

our souls in life, and providing every thing for our support and comfort. And is this the Being to whom we grudge that small portion of time which he requires? But further, this gracious God has so loved us as to give his only-begotten Son to die for us — — — and shall we think it hard to consecrate one day in the week to *him*?

Consider next, what portion of our time it is that he requires. If it had pleased him, he might have given us one day for our bodily concerns, and reserved six for himself: and whatever difficulties such an arrangement had occasioned, it would have been our duty cheerfully to obey his will. But the reverse of this is the proportion that he requires: "Six days," says he, "shalt thou labour; and the seventh day shalt thou keep holy." What base ingratitude then is it to grudge him such a portion of our time as this!

But consider further, for whose sake it is that he requires it. He wants it not for himself: he is not benefited by it: he enjoined the observance of the Sabbath purely for our sakes: he knew that without some appointment for periodical returns of sacred rest, we should soon become so immersed in worldly cares, as utterly to forget our eternal interests; and therefore he fixed such a portion of our time as to his unerring wisdom appeared best, in order that we might be compelled to seek our own truest happiness. This is what he himself tells us; "The Sabbath was made for man[b]." Shall we then, for whose benefit that day was set apart, refuse to consecrate it to the Lord, according to his appointment?

Let but these considerations be weighed, and it will appear a most unreasonable thing to trespass upon that time for temporal pursuits, which God has so mercifully set apart for the concerns of our souls.]

2. A presumptuous sin—

[It is particularly in this view that the context leads us to consider it. God had enjoined the observance of the Sabbath in an audible voice from Mount Sinai[c]; and had afterwards repeatedly commanded that every person who should profane that day by any kind of earthly employment, even the baking of his food, or the lighting of a fire, should be cut off from among his people[d]. Now it was in direct opposition to all these commands that the man of whom we are speaking presumed to gather sticks. He might be ready to excuse himself perhaps by saying, that this was but a small breach of the Sabbath, and the sticks were necessary for his comfort: but these were no excuses: his conduct was a decided act of rebellion

[b] Mark ii. 27. [c] Exod. xx. 8—11.
[d] Exod. xxxi. 14, 15 and xxxv. 2, 3. See also Exod. xvi. 23, 29.

against God; and it is manifest that both Moses and God himself regarded it in that light: it was therefore a presumptuous sin, and consequently, as the Scripture expresses it, "*a reproaching of God himself*" as a hard master that was unfit to be obeyed[o].

Such is every violation of the Sabbath amongst us. It is clear we are not ignorant of his commands respecting that holy day; and what we do, we do in direct opposition to his will: we "reproach him" for exacting of us what he had no right to demand, and we are under no obligation to grant. Let the profaners of the Sabbath regard their conduct in this view, and they will need nothing further to convince them of their guilt.]

Having noticed the guilt of profaning the Sabbath, let us consider,

II. The danger—

[Wherein can this be painted more strongly than in the text? The very sight of this sinful act created instant and universal alarm: and, as Moses did not know in what way it was to be punished, he sought instructions from God himself. Behold now the answer of Almighty God; of him, whose wisdom is unerring, whose justice is most pure, whose mercy is infinite: his answer is, "The man shall surely be put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones that he die:" and let this be done "without the camp," that he may be marked as an accursed sinner, that is separated from me, and shall have no part with my people.

Had the offender been cautioned respecting the consequences of such an act, it is probable that he would have laughed at the idea, or, as the Scripture expresses it, would have "puffed at it." So it is with men at this day: they will not be convinced that there is any danger in what they are pleased to call light sins: but there is a day coming when they will find to their cost, that no sin is light, and least of all is *presumptuous* sin to be so accounted.

If any thing more were needful to evince the danger of violating the Sabbath, we might mention, that this sin is particularly specified, as a very principal occasion of bringing down all those judgments, with which the Jews were visited at the time of their captivity in Babylon. Nehemiah, after the return of the Jews from Babylon, found, that the Sabbath was still shamefully profaned amongst them. To remedy this evil, he exerted all his authority, and expostulated with them in the most energetic manner: "Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath-day? Did not your fathers thus, and

[o] ver. 30, 31.

did not our God bring all this evil upon us and upon our city? Yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath[f]."

Surely then, if such was the issue to the individual that led the way, and such the consequence to the whole nation, when it had followed the example, it will be madness in us to make light of this offence. We may, it is true, escape the judgments of God in this world; (though it is surprising how often they overtake the profaners of the Sabbath;) but we shall certainly not escape them in the world to come.]

Let me then propose this SUBJECT to you as an occasion,

1. For deep humiliation—

[We are apt to think highly of our nation in comparison of the Jewish people: but, if we compare ourselves with them at the period when the events mentioned in our text occurred, we shall see no great reason to boast. Among the Jews there was found but one person in the whole nation that dared to profane the Sabbath: amongst us there is scarcely one in a hundred that does not profane it. Amongst them it was profaned only by gathering a few sticks: amongst us, in every way that can be conceived: it is a day of business or of pleasure to all ranks and orders of men[g] ——— Amongst them, this solitary instance created universal indignation: the spectators instantly communicated the matter to the magistrates, and the magistrates instantly set themselves to stop the evil. But amongst us, with the exception of a few who sigh and mourn in secret, scarcely any regard the evil as of any consequence: the very name of an informer is deemed odious, so that no one chooses to incur the obloquy attached to it; and, if any were zealous and courageous enough to inform, there are but few magistrates who would not shrink back from the task of exercising the power with which they are armed. Such is the state of this nation; such the state of almost every town and village in it. Who then can wonder that we are visited with the divine judgments? Who does not see that this national evil calls for national humiliation?

But let us bring home the matter personally to ourselves. How many Sabbaths have we enjoyed, and yet how few have we kept in the way that God has required! A person that has attained to seventy years of age, has had no less than *ten years of Sabbaths*. What a time is this for securing the interests of the soul! And what a load of guilt has been contracted in all that time, merely from the one single offence of profaning the Sabbath-day! Brethren, we need indeed to lie low before God in dust and ashes. We have need to be thankful too that

[f] Neh. xiii. 17, 18. [g] Shops open, &c. &c.

God's wrath has not broken forth against us, and cut us off in the midst of our transgressions. Let us know how to estimate the forbearance we have experienced; and let "the goodness of our God lead us to repentance."]

2. For holy vigilance—

[The *ceremonial part* of the Sabbath is done away; so that there certainly is a greater latitude allowed to us than was given to the Jews. We acknowledge also that works of necessity and of mercy supersede even those duties which are yet in force on that day. Our Lord himself has taught us to interpret in this view those memorable words of the prophet, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." But the *moral part* is as strongly in force as ever. To have the mind exercised on spiritual subjects, and occupied in advancing the interests of our souls, is our bounden duty. It was the work of the Sabbath even in Paradise; and therefore must continue to be our duty still. If it existed two thousand years before the ceremonial law was given, it can never be vacated by the abrogation of that law. Would we know distinctly the duties of the Sabbath, the prophet Isaiah has, negatively at least, informed us: "Thou shalt call the Sabbath a Delight: thou shalt delight thyself in the Lord, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words[h]." We are to lay aside all the cares and pleasures of the world, and to seek all our happiness in God, and in his immediate service. Even common conversation should as much as possible be put aside, that the mind may be wholly occupied in the service of our God. Now this requires much care and vigilance. The more decent amongst us are ready to think, that, if they attend the house of God once or twice, they have done all that is required of them: from a regard to the prejudices of mankind they abstain from some particular amusements; but they are not at all solicitous to make a due improvement of their time. But this by no means comes up to the injunctions of the prophet; nor will it ever be regarded by God as a just observation of the Sabbath. The instructing of our families, the teaching of poor children, the visiting of the sick, and many other exercises of benevolence, may find place on this day: but in a peculiar manner we are called to secret meditation and prayer: we should study the Holy Scriptures, and examine our own hearts, and endeavour to keep ourselves in readiness to give up our account to God. Let the consideration of the guilt which we contract by spending our Sabbaths in another way, put us upon this: and let every Sabbath that shall be continued to us be so improved, that it may advance our spiritual state, and help forward our preparation for our eternal rest.]

[h] Isai. lviii. 13, 14.

## CLXI.

### THE USE AND INTENT OF FRINGES ON THEIR GARMENTS.

Numb. xv. 37—41. *And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments, throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart, and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: that ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God. I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord your God.*

A VERY principal distinction between the Christian and Jewish codes is this; that our laws are given in broad, general, comprehensive principles; whereas theirs descended to the most minute particulars, even such as we should have been ready to conceive unworthy the notice of the Divine Lawgiver. There was scarcely any occupation in life, respecting which there was not some precise limit fixed, some positive precept enjoined. If they *ploughed,* they must not plough with an ox and an ass. If they *sowed* their ground, they must not sow divers kinds of seeds. If they *reaped,* they must not reap the corners of their field. If they *carried* their corn, they must not go back for a sheaf that they had left behind. If they *threshed* it, they must not muzzle the ox that trod it out. If they *killed* their meat, they must pour the blood upon the ground. If they *dressed* it, they must not seethe a kid in its mother's milk. If they *ate* it, they must not eat the fat. If they *planted* a tree, they must not eat of the fruit for four years. If they *built a house,* they must make battlements to its roof. So, if they *made a garment,* they must put upon it a fringe with a ribband of blue. This last ordinance, it may be thought, like all the other ceremonies, being abrogated, is quite uninteresting to us. But, if we consider it attentively, we shall find it by no means uninstructive. It shews us,

I. The end which we ought to aim at—

That, for which the use of the fringe was appointed to the Jews, is equally necessary for us; namely, to preserve continually upon our minds a sense of,

1. Our duty to God—

[We are told to "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long." For this purpose we should have the commandments of God ever, as it were, before our eyes. It is not unuseful to have habitually some short portion of the word of God, some one precept or promise, for our meditation through the day, especially at those intervals when the mind has nothing particular to engage its attention. The expediency of such an habit appears from the text itself: for, if we have nothing good at hand for our meditations, "the eye and the heart" will furnish evil enough. In our unconverted state we uniformly, as God himself expresses it, "go a whoring after these:" our affections are estranged from God, and our thoughts from time to time fix on some vanity which our eyes have seen, or on some evil which our own wicked heart has suggested. How desirable were it, instead of having our minds thus occupied, to have them filled with heavenly contemplations; to be searching out our duty; to be examining our own hearts in relation to it; and to be inquiring continually wherein we can make our profiting to appear!]

2. Our obligations to him—

[How strong and energetic are the expressions in our text respecting this! "I am your God: I have redeemed you in order that I might be so to the utmost possible extent: and I consider all that I am, and all that I have, as yours." If these mercies, as far as they were vouchsafed to the Jews, deserved to be had in continual remembrance, how much greater cause have *we* to remember them; *we*, who have been redeemed, not from Egypt, but from hell itself; and not by power only, but by price, even by the precious blood of God's only-begotten Son; and who have such an interest in God, that he not merely dwells *amongst* us, but *in* us, being one with us, as he is one with Christ himself[a]! Methinks, instead of finding it difficult to turn our minds to this subject, it may well appear strange that we can for a moment fix them upon any thing else. Were we day and night to "meditate on the loving-kindness of our God, our souls would be filled as with marrow and fatness, and our mouth would praise him with joyful lips[b]."]

[a] John xv. 5. and xvii. 21—23. and 1 Cor. vi. 17.
[b] Ps. lxiii. 3—6.

The ordinance before us goes further still, and prescribes,

II. The means by which we are to obtain it—

True it is that no distinctions in dress are prescribed to us: the ordinance in this respect is annulled. But, as a means to an end, the appointment of the fringe may teach us,

1. To make a spiritual improvement of sensible objects—

[*This was the direct intent of the fringes* on their garments: they were as monitors, to remind the people of their duty and obligations. And why may not we receive similar admonitions from every thing around us? Has not our blessed Lord set us the example? For instance, What part of husbandry is there which he has not made a source of spiritual instruction? the ploughing, the sowing, the weeding, the growth, the reaping, the carrying, the winnowing, the destruction of the chaff, and the treasuring up of the wheat, are all improved by him in this view. There are some things also which he has expressly ordained to be used for this end. What is the water in baptism, but to remind us of "the answer of a good conscience towards God[c]?" What are the bread and wine in the Lord's supper, but to be signs to us of his body broken, and his blood shed, for the sins of the whole world? We acknowledge that those things only which he has *appointed* to be signs, are *of necessity* to be used as such; but we are *at liberty* to use every thing in that view; and so far from its being superstitious to do so, it is highly reasonable and proper to do it: it then only becomes superstitious, when it is *rested in as an end*, or *used as a mean for an end which it has no proper tendency to effect.* Some have been offended with the use of the cross in baptism: and if it were intended as any kind of charm, they might well be offended with it: but it is, as the Liturgy expresses it, "a token that hereafter the child shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified:" and, if it serve to impress the minds of the sponsors in that light, it is well: if it do not, the fault is not in *it*, but in *them.* The same may we say in reference to the names, the titles, and the habits that are in use amongst us. Our Christian name, as it is called, should never be mentioned without bringing to our remembrance HIM, "whose we are, and whom we are bound to serve." The titles which are given to men, either on account of their rank in society, or of their consecration to the sacred office of the ministry, may well be improved for that end for

[c] 1 Pet. iii. 21.

which they were originally given; not merely to shew to others what respect was due to the individuals, but to shew to the individuals themselves what might justly be expected of them, and what their rank and office required: the one should maintain his *honour* unsullied; the other should be so heavenly in his deportment as to constrain all to *revere* him. In this view, the use of the surplice was doubtless well intended; and happy would it be if all who wear it were reminded, as often as they put it on, how pure and spotless they ought to be, both in their hearts and lives. The very sight of a lofty church should remind us, that we are temples of the living God; whilst the spire pointing upwards, may well direct us to lift up our hearts to God.

Let us not be misunderstood. We contend not for any of these things as necessary; but we learn from our text that they may be rendered subservient to a blessed end, and that it is our privilege to make every thing around us a step towards heaven.]

2. To get the law itself written in our hearts—

[Whilst the fringes had in themselves a practical use, they were also emblematical of benefits which were to be more fully bestowed under the Christian dispensation. As a sign they are abolished: but the thing signified remains in undiminished force. What the thing signified was, we are at no loss to determine: it was, that the law, of which a visible memorial was to be worn by *the Jews*, was to be inscribed in lively characters on *our* hearts. To this effect Moses speaks repeatedly, when giving directions respecting those other memorials of the law, which were to be worn on the forehead, and on the neck, and arms: "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine *heart*: and thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes[d]." And again, "Ye shall lay up these my words in *your heart* and in *your soul*[e]." Hence the real design of God even as it respected *them*, and much more as it respects *us*, is evident. Moreover, God has promised this very thing to us, as the distinguishing blessing of the new covenant: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts[f]."

Now this is the true way to attain that constant sense of our duty and obligations to God, which have been before mentioned. For, if his law be written on our hearts, we shall find the same disposition to meditate upon it, as a covetous man does to meditate upon his gains, and an ambitious man on his distinctions. It is true, the heart has more to struggle with in the one case than the other; but, in proportion as divine grace prevails, holy exercises will be easy and delightful.]

[d] Deut. vi. 6—9. [e] Deut. xi. 18—20. See also Prov. iii. 3.
[f] Jer. xxxi. 33. with Heb. viii. 10.

3. To exhibit that law in our lives—

[The fringe was a distinction which shewed to every one of what religion they were. Thus there is a singularity which we also are to maintain: we are to be "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." If others will not walk with us in the narrow path of holiness, it is not our fault that we are singular, but theirs: we are no more blameable for differing from them, than Noah, Lot, Daniel, or Elijah, were for differing from the people amongst whom they lived. As to singularity in dress, it is rather to be avoided than desired. Our distinctions must be found only in the conformity of our lives to the word of God. Whilst the world are clad in gay attire, let us "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," and be "clothed with humility:" yea, let us "put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." This is the way to honour God; and the more we strive to adorn our holy profession, the more peace and happiness we shall enjoy in it. In a word, holiness is our fringe: let us wear it: let us not be ashamed of it, but rather endeavour to "make our light to shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." Of course, I must not be understood to recommend any thing like ostentation: *that* is hateful both to God and man: but a bold, open, manly confession of Christ crucified is the indispensable duty of all who are called by his name: and "if we deny him, he will assuredly deny us." I say then again, let us wear the fringe, and not indulge a wish to hide it. But let us be careful that "the ribband be of blue:" it must not be of any fading colour: our piety must be uniform in all places, and unchanging under all circumstances. We must be the same in the world as in the house of God. We must be "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord;" and then we are assured, that "our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

## CLXII.

### KORAH'S REBELLION.

Numb. xvi. 38. *The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar; for they offered them before the Lord; therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel.*

IT is painful, in perusing the history of the Israelites, to see how constantly they were murmuring and rebelling against God. Persons who are ignorant of

their own hearts are ready to conceive of them as more perverse and obstinate than the rest of mankind: but they who know what human nature is, behold in their rebellions a true picture of mankind at large. In the chapter before us we have an exact representation of a popular tumult: we see the motives and principles by which factious demagogues are actuated, and the lamentable evils which they produce. The censers of which our text speaks were formed into plates for a covering of the altar, that they might remain to all future generations: and, though we behold now the altar before us, they are no less a memorial than they were to the Israelites of old.

Let us consider,

I. The history before us—

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, raised a rebellion against Moses and Aaron—

Let us mark how they proceeded. They complained that Moses and Aaron had usurped an undue authority over the congregation: and Moses in particular had ensnared them, and brought them into the wilderness for that very purpose[a]. For the purpose of making an invidious comparison between their former state in Egypt and their present state[b], they represented Egypt as flowing with milk and honey. As to themselves, they disclaimed any regard to that; and professed to be actuated by a generous concern for the public good: they were true patriots: they were enemies to tyranny, and friends to the liberties of mankind: liberty and equality was their motto[c]. Such were their professions: and by these they imposed upon many, and rendered them dissatisfied with the government of church and state.

But what were their principles? They envied the power [illegible] which their governors were invested, and wished to obtain a like pre-eminence for themselves. They pretended to consult the state of the people at large, when a patriotic concern for others was a mere pretence for the purpose of gaining partisans. They envied the Levites, and Dathan and Abiram [illegible] among the princes of the congregation: [illegible] could endure no dignity superior: and this was the true cause of all their

[a] ver. 13, 14. [b] ver. 3. [c] ver. 3.

discontent and clamour[e]: and if by means of this insurrection they could have obtained the distinction which they aimed at, not a word more would have been uttered on the subject of national grievances; nor would one hundredth part of the care have been taken to prevent them. It is impossible to read the history and not to see that this was the true state of the case.

What an insight does this give us into that which is usually dignified with the name of patriotism! If ever there was a mild and just governor, it was Moses. If ever there was a pious, affectionate, and diligent minister, it was Aaron. If ever there was a well-administered government both in church and state, it was at that time. If ever people had cause to be satisfied and happy, it was then. There was not a single ground of sorrow amongst all the people, except that which had arisen solely from their own perverseness, their detention in the wilderness. Yet a few factious demagogues prevail to spread dissatisfaction through the whole camp: and their oppressed state of bondage in Egypt is declared to be preferable to the grievances which they then experienced.]

But, in fact, their rebellion was against God himself—

[This is plainly declared to them by Moses[f]. What matter was there of complaint against Aaron? He did only what God had commanded him: and was he to be blamed for that? Moses forbears to make the same apology for himself: but his observation was equally applicable to himself, who had done nothing but by the express command of God. The conspirators then were in reality fighting against God himself, by whose direction every measure of the government had been taken. Moreover there was a typical design in these divine appointments, which this conspiracy was calculated to defeat. Thus, whilst envy and ambition characterized the conduct of the conspirators towards man, they betrayed also the grossest impiety and presumption towards God.]

The best estimate of their conduct may be found in the punishment inflicted for it—

[This was truly awful. Moses had obtained mercy from God for the congregation at large; but the leaders of the rebellion must be punished. Accordingly, whilst Dathan and Abiram, together with their wives, and families, and adherents, stood in the door of their tents, setting God himself, as it were, at defiance, Moses declared by what an extraordinary judgment they should perish: and no sooner had he spoken, than the judgment was inflicted: "the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them all up, with all that appertained unto them." As for the two hundred and fifty persons who presumed to make

[e] ver. 7. [f] ver. 11.

their appeal to God respecting their title to the priesthood, "a fire came forth from the Lord, and consumed them all." Terrible was this if viewed only as a temporal judgment: but if considered in reference to the eternal world, it was awful indeed! That it might be kept in remembrance for the instruction of future ages, "the censers, in which they had offered incense, were ordered to be made into broad plates for a covering of the altar."]

It will be proper then that we distinctly consider,

II. The instruction to be gathered from it—

To us, no less than to the Jews, does this event most clearly speak. It shews us,

1. That sin is an act of hostility against our own souls—

[These rebels might be said to sin against their governors and against God: but they were "sinners also against their own souls:" and, had the object of their desire been the destruction of their own souls, they could not have prosecuted their end by any surer means. Little is this thought of by those who live in sin: but, whatever be the sin which they commit, the effect is still the same[g]. If a man will only keep from sin, he may defy all the assaults either of men or devils. Men may destroy his body, but they cannot touch his soul. Satan himself cannot hurt his soul, without his own consent. Sin is the only medium by which the soul can receive any injury. But that inflicts upon it a deadly wound: that destroys its innocence and peace: that brings down upon it the wrath of an incensed God: that subjects it to everlasting misery. See how the earth swallowed up some, and how the fire consumed others; and there you will learn the fate of all who die in their sins: hell will open wide its mouth to swallow them up, and unquenchable fire will consume them as its proper and appointed fuel——— O that men were wise, and would consider this; and turn, every one of them, from the evil of their ways!]

2. That opposition to constituted authorities is highly displeasing to God—

[We are far from denying that there is such a thing as real patriotism: nor do we mean to say that tyranny and oppression *may* not rise to such a height, as to justify the overthrow of an existing government. But this we say, that a real Christian will not be hasty to complain of grievances, even where they do exist; much less will he bear the smallest resemblance to these factious people, whose case we have been considering. The Christian is one of "them that are quiet in the land." He

[g] Prov. viii. 36.

regards government as God's ordinance; and the persons who are invested with authority as God's representatives. He considers that, in obeying them, he obeys God; and in unnecessarily and vexatiously opposing them, he opposes God: and he knows that "God is the avenger of all such," yea, that such persons "shall receive to themselves damnation[h]:" the government itself may justly inflict punishment upon them; and God himself will punish such conduct in the eternal world. Persons of this stamp often pretend to religion: and so they did in the days of the Apostles: but those who "despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities," have a "woe" denounced against them: their spirit is justly marked as a compound of envy, covetousness, and ambition; and having resembled Cain and Balaam in their spirit, they shall resemble Korah in their fate: they shall be eternal monuments of God's heavy displeasure[i].

Happy would it be if persons who are of a factious and turbulent disposition would look occasionally on *these* "*censers*," and reap the instruction which they are intended to convey!]

3. That a rejection of Christ must of necessity prove fatal to the soul—

[Moses as the governor, and Aaron as the high-priest, of Israel, were types and representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ[k]: and in rebelling against *them*, they virtually rebelled against *him* also. Thus, amongst ourselves, how many are there who say, "We will not have this man to reign over us[l]!" Some complain of his *authority*, as imposing an insupportable yoke upon them; and others of his *priesthood*, as prohibiting any access to God except through him as the only Mediator. But what the issue of such rebellion will be, we are faithfully warned, and *that* too with some reference, it should seem, to the judgments exercised on Korah and his company[m]. At all events, if the opposers of Moses and Aaron were so fearfully destroyed, we may be sure that a far heavier judgment awaits the contemners and opposers of Christ[n]———Let those who do not thankfully come to God by Christ, and unreservedly obey his holy will, be instructed by these events———In particular, we entreat them to act like Israel in the case before us: "All Israel that were gathered round the tents of Dathan and Abiram, fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also[o]." Could we but hear the cry of those that are in hell, we should no longer sit supine and confident. O let us realize this thought ere it be too late, and "flee in earnest from the wrath to come!"]

[h] Rom. xiii. 1, 2. [i] Jude, ver. 8, 11.
[k] Acts vii. 37—39. Heb. viii. 1, 2. and ix. 11, 12. [l] Luke xix. 14.
[m] Heb. x. 26, 27. [n] Heb. x. 28, 29. with Luke xix. 27.
[o] ver. 34.

## CLXIII.

### AARON'S INTERCESSION.

Numb. xvi. 48. *And he stood between the dead and the living: and the plague was stayed.*

CORRUPT as human nature is, there are some sins which we scarcely think it possible for a rational being to be guilty of; and, if it were suggested to us that we ourselves were in danger of committing them, we should be ready to reply, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" Such is the sin which all the congregation of Israel committed on the very day after the death of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. These three persons had excited a rebellion against Moses and Aaron; Korah and his company aspiring to the priesthood, and Dathan and Abiram, with their friends, affecting the office of supreme governor. For this their impiety they had been severely punished; Korah and his company being destroyed by fire that issued from the tabernacle; and all the relatives of Dathan and Abiram being swallowed up by an earthquake. These signal judgments, one would have thought, should have effectually silenced every murmur throughout the camp: but, instead of being humbled, the people were the more enraged; and murmured more than ever against Moses and Aaron, complaining, that the people who had been destroyed were "the people of the Lord," and that Moses and Aaron had been their murderers: "Ye have killed the people of the Lord." God now renewed his threatening to destroy them: but Moses and Aaron "fell upon their faces," as they had done frequently before[a], and importuned God to spare them. God however would not spare them, but sent a plague among them for their destruction. But no sooner did Moses perceive that "the plague was begun," than he sent Aaron with an offering of incense to arrest its progress. Aaron went immediately into the midst of the people, and succeeded according to his wishes: "he stood between the dead and the living: and the plague was stayed."

[a] Compare ver. 45. with Numb. xiv. 5. and xvi. 4, 22.

This subject is to be considered in a two-fold view;

I. As an historical fact—

In this view it is worthy of particular attention. We cannot but admire,

1. The interposition of Aaron—

[If ever opposition was unreasonable, it was then: if ever a people had offended beyond all sufferance, it was at that time. Well might Moses and Aaron have said, 'We have interceded for you often enough: we have repeatedly saved every one of you from destruction: and now, because God has seen fit to punish some of the ringleaders in rebellion, we are charged with having killed them. If mercies will not reclaim you, it is high time that judgments should be tried.' But not a thought of this kind entered into their hearts. They were filled with nothing but compassion and love. They fell on their faces to intercede for these rebellious people, as much as if they had received no provocation at their hands. The expedient suggested by Moses was instantly carried into effect: and Aaron, at his advanced age, ran with haste into the midst of the congregation, to make an atonement for them. He did not know but that the incensed people would wreak their vengeance upon him, as they had frequently threatened to do; and put him to death, as the author of their present sufferings. Nor could he be certain, but that, if he ran into the midst of the plague, it might sweep him away together with the rest. But he thought not of himself, nor listened for a moment to any personal considerations. He was intent only on saving the lives of his fellow-creatures.

What a glorious example did he afford to all future ministers! What a blessing would it be to the Church, if all her priests were like him; if all could say, "I count not my life dear to me, so that I may but fulfil my ministry[b];" "most gladly will I spend and be spent for my people, though, the more abundantly I love them, the less I be loved[c]:" "I could wish even to be accursed after the example of Christ, if I might but by any means save only some[d]:" yea, most cheerfully would "I suffer all things for their sakes, that they might obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory[e]!" Were there more tender compassion amongst us, more ardent love, more self-denying zeal, more active exertion to "pluck our people as brands out of the fire," and more willingness to perish in the attempt, we might not stop the mouths of gainsayers, it is true; but "we should save many souls alive," and have them to be "our joy and crown of rejoicing" to all eternity. O that

[b] Acts xx. 24. [c] 2 Cor. xii. 15. [d] Rom. ix. 3. 1 Cor. ix. 22. [e] 2 Tim. ii. 10.

"God would speak the word, and that great might be the company of such preachers[f]!"]

2. The effect of it—

[How wonderful! No sooner does the cloud of incense arise from Aaron's hands, than the plague is stayed! On the day before, two hundred and fifty censers full of incense had been offered at the tabernacle, and had brought instantaneous destruction on the offerers: now the incense from one single censer averts destruction from all the congregation of Israel. The plague was spreading its ravages with such rapidity, that already, notwithstanding Aaron's haste, fourteen thousand seven hundred persons had died of it: but the moment he reached the spot, the arm of justice was arrested, and the sword fell from the hand of the destroying angel. It proceeded irresistibly till it came to Aaron; but could not advance one hair's breadth beyond him. On the one side of him all were dead; on the other, all remained alive. What a testimony was this to Aaron's divine appointment! What a refutation was here of the accusations brought against him! and, above all, what an encouragement was here given to all future generations to abound in prayer and intercession! O! what might not be effected for the souls of men, if all ministers were men of prayer, and all who profess themselves the servants of the Lord would interpose between the living and the dead! O that "a spirit of prayer might be poured out upon us" all! If only we took our fire from off the altar of burnt-offering, the smoke of our incense should come up with acceptance before God: "We might ask what we would, and it should be done unto us[g]."]

As a history this passage is instructive: but it is no less so,

II. As an emblematic record—

They who read the Scriptures *merely* as a history, read them like children. The Old Testament, as well as the New, contains the deepest mysteries: and, to understand it aright, we must consider it not only "in the letter, but in the spirit." Now the passage before us has undoubtedly an emblematic import: it was intended to shadow forth,

1. The means by which God's wrath is to be averted—

[Aaron himself was a type of Christ; and the atonement which he now made for the people was typical of that great atonement which Christ himself was in due time to make for

[f] Ps. lxviii. 11. [g] John xv. 7.

the sins of the whole world. There was indeed no animal slain; for there was now no time for sacrifice: but the fire taken from off the altar of burnt-offering, whereon the sacrifices were consumed, was considered on this occasion in the same light as "an atonement:" and the incense burnt on this occasion typified the intercession of our great High-Priest. By these two, the sacrifice and intercession of Christ, the whole world is to be saved. To this the whole Scriptures bear witness. What can be clearer than the prediction of the prophet Isaiah; "He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors[h]?" What more express than the declaration of the beloved Apostle; "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins[i]?" The one intent of the Epistle to the Hebrews is to establish and illustrate this glorious truth.

Let us then look beyond Aaron and the rebellious Israelites, to Christ and a rebellious world. Let us see with what eager desire for our welfare HE left the bosom of his Father, and came into the midst of us, not at the risk of his life, but on purpose to "make his soul an offering for sin[k]." Let us hear too with what compassion he interceded for his very murderers; "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Let us look through the shadow to the substance. Then shall we have a right understanding of the history when we view it as "a shadow of good things to come."]

2. The efficacy of them for the end proposed—

[Death was arrested in its career, and could proceed no further. And to what is it owing that our rebellious world has not long since been consigned over to destruction? "Not unto us, O Lord Jesu Christ, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise:" thou by thine atoning blood hast made reconciliation between God and us; and by thy prevailing intercession hast procured for us the mercies we so greatly need. Can we doubt whether this statement be true? St. Paul expressly tells us that Christ is "our Peace:" and, in that view of him, exultingly exclaims, "Who is he that condemneth? it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who also maketh intercession for us[l]:" and he tells us further, that "Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us[m]."

Here then again let us view the history in its proper light: and let us learn, Whither to look, and, In whom to hope, whensoever our sins have raised the divine displeasure against us. Let us learn too the force of that apostolic argument, so weak in logic, but so sound in theology, "If the censer in

[h] Isai. liii. 12. [i] 1 John ii. 1, 2. [k] Isai. liii. 10.
[l] Rom. viii. 34. [m] Heb. vii. 25.

Aaron's hand prevailed for the preservation of one rebellious people from temporal death, how much more shall the atonement and intercession of Christ prevail for the everlasting salvation of our souls, yea, for the souls of the whole world[n]!"]

From the whole of this subject let us LEARN the duties,

1. Of faith—

[In the case before us, the benefit was conferred on account of Aaron's faith, just as our Lord afterwards healed the paralytic on account of the faith of those who brought him: but in the great concerns of our souls, nothing can be obtained but through the exercise of our own faith. Notwithstanding our great High-Priest has performed the whole of his office, no benefit will accrue to us, unless we believe in him. In this respect we are to resemble the Israelites when bitten by the fiery serpents; we must look unto the brasen serpent in order to be healed; or, in other words, we must regard the Lord Jesus Christ as our Advocate and propitiation: we must renounce every other hope, and "flee for refuge to him as to the hope set before us." On the one hand, we must not construe the forbearance of God as an approbation of our ways, as though we had no ground for fear: nor, on the other hand, should the greatness of our guilt or the multitude of our provocations make us despair, as though there were no ground for hope: but, viewing Christ as the appointed Mediator between God and us, we should "go to God through him," trusting to his promise, that "he will in no wise cast us out."]

2. Of love—

[We see not men struck dead around us under any visible marks of the divine displeasure: but we know that "God is angry with the wicked every day," and is summoning multitudes to his tribunal under the weight and guilt of all their sins. What are we then about? How can we behold these things with such indifference? Why do we loiter? Why do we not run, as it were, into the midst of the congregation, in order, if possible, to awaken them from their stupor, and to save their precious souls? Why do we not at all events betake ourselves to prayer? We have, at least, our censers nigh at hand, if only we would take fire from the altar of burnt-offering, and burn incense on them. Let it not be said, "This is the work of ministers:" doubtless it is so; but not of them exclusively: they should lead the way, it is true, and be examples to the flock; but others should imitate their example, and "be followers of them, as they are of Christ;" or rather, should follow Christ, whether *they* will follow him or not. I call you then,

[n] See Heb. ix. 13, 14.

every one of you, to forget yourselves, as it were, and your own personal concerns, and to be swallowed up with love and pity for your perishing fellow-creatures. Remember that they are not a whit safer by reason of their delusions. They may call rebels, "the people of the Lord;" but that will not make them the Lord's people. They may cry out against God's judgments as injustice and cruelty; but that will not prevent those judgments from being inflicted, either on others or themselves: yea rather, it will bring down those very judgments the more speedily, and more heavily, upon them. Try then to stir up within you the feelings of men, the feelings of Christians: "Of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh[o]."]

[o] Jude, ver. 22, 23.

## CLXIV.

### AARON'S ROD THAT BUDDED.

Numb. xvii. 10. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not.*

ONE cannot read one page in the Bible without seeing abundant evidence that God delighteth in the exercise of mercy. Judgment is with great truth called, "his strange act:" it is an act to which he never resorts but from absolute necessity: but mercy is his darling attribute; and to that he is inclined, even when the conduct of his enemies calls most loudly for tokens of his displeasure. Of this we have a surprising instance in the chapter before us. The competitors with Aaron for the high-priesthood had been struck dead by fire whilst they were in the very act of presenting their offerings to God; whilst their associates in rebellion, with their whole families, were swallowed up by an earthquake. These judgments produced a murmuring throughout the camp; and fourteen thousand seven hundred were swept off by a plague, which was stopped only by the interposition of Aaron. The people now were dumb: but God knew that, though intimidated, they were not so

convinced, but that they would on some future occasion renew their pretensions to the priesthood, and thereby provoke him to destroy them utterly. Of his own rich mercy therefore he proposed to give them a sign, which should for ever silence their murmurings and preclude the necessity of heavier judgments.

In opening this subject we shall shew,

I. What God did to confirm the Aaronic priesthood—

He commanded the head of every tribe to bring a rod or staff to Moses, who inscribed on every one of them the owner's name. These all together were placed before the ark: and the people were taught to expect, that the rod belonging to that tribe which God had chosen for the priesthood, should blossom; whilst all the other rods should remain as they were. On the morrow the rods were all brought forth. The owners severally took their own: and Aaron's was distinguished from the rest by the mark proposed; "it was budded, and brought forth buds, and blossomed blossoms, and yielded almonds." The controversy being thus decided, God commanded that Aaron's rod should be brought again before the ark, and "be kept *for a token against the rebels.*" How long it was preserved, cannot be ascertained; but that it was for a very long period, is certain; because St. Paul speaks of that, and the golden pot that had manna, as known appendages to the ark.[a] Thus its use was not confined to that generation: it remained to future ages,

1. An evidence of God's decision—

[The change wrought upon the rod in one single night, together with its having at once all the different stages of vegetation, "buds, blossoms, fruit," *this* was sufficient to convince the most incredulous: no room could hereafter be left for doubt upon the subject. Nor do we find from this time even to the days of King Uzziah, that any one dared to usurp again the priestly office.]

2. A memorial of his mercy—

[Justly might the people have been utterly destroyed for their continued murmurings against God. But God here

[a] Heb. ix. 4.

shewed, that "he desireth not the death of sinners, but rather that they should turn from their wickedness and live." This was the avowed design of the test which God proposed; "It shall quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not." What astonishing condescension! Was it not enough for him to make the appointment, but must he use such methods to convince unreasonable men; to convince those, whom neither mercies nor judgments had before convinced? Had it been given, like Gideon's fleece, to assure a doubting saint, we should the less have wondered at it; but when it was given as a superabundant proof to silence the most incorrigible rebels, it remained a monument to all future ages, that God is indeed "full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great kindness."]

3. A witness for him, in case he should be hereafter compelled to inflict his judgments upon them—

[It is well called "a token against the rebels." God might at all future periods point to it, and ask, "What could have been done more for my people, than I have done for them[b]?" Have they not procured my judgments by their own wilful and obstinate transgressions[c]? — — — By this means, whatever judgments he should from that time inflict, he would "be justified in what he ordained, and be clear when he judged[d]."]

If we bear in mind that the Aaronic priesthood was typical, we shall see the propriety of considering,

II. What he has done to confirm the priesthood of Christ—

The whole Epistle to the Hebrews is written to shew that the Aaronic priesthood typified that of the Lord Jesus, and was accomplished by it. This will account for the jealousy which God manifested on the subject of the Aaronic priesthood, and the care that he took to establish it on an immovable foundation. Whether there was any thing typical in the peculiar means by which it was established, we will not pretend to determine: but certain it is that there is a striking correspondence between the blossoming of Aaron's rod, and those things by which Christ's priesthood is established. Two things in particular we shall mention as placing beyond all doubt the appointment of the Lord Jesus to the priestly office:

1. The resurrection of Christ—

[Christ is expressly called, "a rod out of the stem of

[b] Isai. v. 3, 4. [c] Jer. ii. 17. and iv. 18. [d] Ps. li. 4.

Jesse[e];" and so little prospect was there, according to human appearances, that he should ever flourish, that it was said of him, "He shall grow up as a tender plant, and as a root out of the dry ground:" "He is despised and rejected of men[f]." If this was his state whilst yet alive, how much more must it be so when he was dead and buried! His enemies then triumphed over him as a deceiver, and his followers despaired of ever seeing his pretensions realized. But behold, with the intervention of one single day, this dry rod revived, and blossomed to the astonishment and confusion of all his adversaries. Now indeed it appeared that God had "appointed him to be both Lord and Christ[g]." Now it was proved, that "his enemies should become his footstool[h]." On his ascension to heaven he was laid up, as it were, beside the testimony in the immediate presence of his God, to be "*a token against the rebels.*" There is he "a token," that God desires to save his rebellious people: that "he has laid help for them upon one that is mighty:" that all which is necessary for their salvation is already accomplished: that their great High-Priest, having made atonement for them, is entered within the veil; and that "he is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." If any shall now reject him, he will be "a swift witness against them;" and God will be justified, yea he will glorify himself in their eternal condemnation.]

2. The spread of the Gospel—

[The Gospel is represented by God as "the rod of his strength[i]:" and in reference, as it should seem, to the very miracle before us, its miraculous propagation through the earth is thus foretold: "God shall cause them that come of Jacob to take root: Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit[k]." Consider how the Gospel militated against all the prejudices and passions of mankind, and by whom it was to be propagated, (a few poor fishermen,) and it will appear, that the blossoming of Aaron's rod was not a more unlikely event than that Christianity should be established in the world. Yet behold, a very short space of time was sufficient for the diffusion of it throughout the Roman empire; and, from its first propagation to the present moment, not all the efforts of men or devils have been able to root it out. The spread of Mahometanism affords no parallel to this; because that was propagated by the sword, and tended rather to gratify, than counteract, the sinful passions of mankind. The doctrine of the cross not only gained acceptance through the world, but transformed the very natures of men into the divine image.

[e] Isai. xi. 1. [f] Isai. liii. 2, 3. [g] Acts ii. 32, 36. [h] Acts ii. 34, 35.
[i] Ps. cx. 2. [k] Isai. xxvii. 6. with Matt. xxiv. 14.

Such operations, visible in every place, and in every stage of their progress from their first budding to the production of ripe fruit, could not but prove, that the priesthood which it maintained was of divine appointment; that the doctrine which it published was suited to our necessities; and that all who embraced it should be saved by it. In this view every individual believer is a witness for God, and "a token against the rebels;" inasmuch as he manifests to all the power and efficacy of the gospel salvation: he is "an epistle of Christ, known and read of all men;" and, by his earnestness in the ways of God, he says to all around him, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation?" Yes; every soul that shall have found mercy through the mediation of our great High-Priest, will, in the last day, rise up in judgment against the despisers of his salvation, and condemn them: nor will the condemned criminals themselves be able to offer a plea in arrest of judgment.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are unconscious of having rejected Christ—

[It is not necessary in order to a rejection of Christ that we should combine against him as the Israelites did against Aaron: we reject him, in fact, if we do not receive him for the ends and purposes for which he was sent. Our inquiry then must be, not, Have I conspired against him, and openly cast him off? but, Am I daily making HIM the one medium of my access to God, and expecting salvation through him alone? ——— If we have not thus practically regarded him in his mediatorial character, we are decided rebels against God.]

2. Those who begin to be sensible of their rebellion against him—

[Men are apt to run to extremes: the transition from presumption to despondency is very common. See how rapidly it took place in the rebellious Israelites! No sooner did they see the controversy decided, than they cried, "Behold we die, we perish, we all perish! Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the Lord shall die: shall we be consumed with dying[1]?" What consternation and terror did they here express! Just before, they would be priests, and come to the very altar of God: and now, they will not "come any thing near the tabernacle," though it was their duty to bring their sacrifices to the very door thereof. So it is too often with us. Before we are convinced of sin, we cast off all fear of God's judgments; and, when convinced, we put away all hope of his mercy. Let it not be thus. The very means which God has used for our conviction, are proofs and evidences of his tender

[1] ver. 12, 13.

mercy — — — Only let us come to him through Christ, and all our past iniquities shall be "blotted out as a morning cloud."]

3. Those who confess him as their divinely appointed Mediator—

[From this time the Israelites never presumed to approach the Lord but through the mediation of the high-priest. Whether they offered sacrifices or gifts, they equally acknowledged the unacceptableness of them in any other than the appointed way. Thus must we do. Not any thing must be presented to God, or be expected from him, but in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. If we approach God in any other way, we shall find him "a consuming fire." Let this be remembered by us: it cannot possibly be too deeply engraven on our minds. If God manifested such indignation against those who disregarded the shadow, what must be the fate of those who disregard the substance? If we reject Christ, we have nothing to hope for; if we cleave unto him, we have nothing to fear.]

## CLXV.

### THE LAW OF PURIFICATION.

Numb. xix. 17—20. *For an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel; and a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: and the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the Lord: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean.*

AN inspired Apostle has acknowledged, that the yoke imposed upon the Jews was quite insupportable. Where the reason of the ordinances was apparent, and the observance of them easy, we may suppose that the people would cheerfully comply with them: but, in many cases, the rites prescribed were very burthensome; they laid the people under severe restraints, entailed upon them heavy expenses, deprived them of many comforts, and subjected them to great

inconveniences, apparently without any adequate reason. This might be illustrated by many of the ordinances; but in none so forcibly as in that before us. The kind of defilement which was to be remedied, was as light and venial as could possibly be conceived: it implied no moral guilt whatever; nor could possibly in some cases be avoided: yet it rendered a person unclean seven days; and every thing that he touched, was also made unclean; and every person who might, however inadvertently, come in contact with any thing that had been touched by him, was also made unclean. Moreover, if any person that had contracted this ceremonial defilement, concealed it, or refused to submit to this prescribed form of purification, he was to be cut off from God's people. We do not wonder, that the proud heart of man should rise up in rebellion against such an ordinance as this: and still less do we wonder that the pious Jews should long for the Messiah, who was to liberate his people from such a yoke.

But if, on the one hand, this was the most burthensome ordinance, it was, on the other hand, the most edifying to those who could discover its true import. It may well be doubted whether in any other ordinance whatever there can be found so rich a variety of instructive matter, as may justly be deduced from that before us.

To confirm this assertion, we shall state,

I. Its typical import—

On this we shall dwell no longer than is necessary to prepare the way for the instruction which the subject is suited to convey. We will however, for the sake of perspicuity, call your attention to the ordinance under two distinct heads;

1. The preparation of the heifer for its destined use—

[A red heifer was *taken from the congregation;* it was to be *without spot or blemish;* and it must be one that had *never borne a yoke.* Being brought *without the camp,* it was slain in the presence of the priest, who with his finger *sprinkled the blood "directly before the tabernacle, seven times." The whole carcase* was then *burned* in his presence; (the skin, the

flesh, the blood, the dung, were all burned together;) and some cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet wool were burned with it. Then *the ashes* of the heifer were gathered up by another person, and *deposited in a clean place* without the camp.

Every minute particular of this ordinance we shall not attempt to explain: but its leading features are clear. We see here the Lord *Jesus Christ*, taken from, and separated for, *the whole mass of mankind*. We see him who was "*without blemish and without spot*," and who was *under no previous obligation* to suffer for us, coming voluntarily into the world for that express purpose. We see him *suffering* the most inconceivable agonies both in body and soul even *unto death, without the gates of Jerusalem*. We see him *sprinkling his own blood* before the mercy-seat of the Most High God, in order to effect a *perfect reconciliation* between God and us. And that one atonement which was offered by him for the sins of the whole world, we see to be of *perpetual efficacy* in the Church, and ever ready at hand to be applied for the purification of those who desire deliverance from sin and death.]

2. The application of it to that use—

[A portion of the ashes being put into a vessel, *running water* was poured upon them: and then a bunch of *hyssop* was dipped in the water, and the *unclean person*, together with every thing which had been defiled through him, was *sprinkled* with it. This was done on the *third day*, and on the *seventh day*; and then the unclean person was considered as purified from his defilement.

Here we behold *the Holy Spirit co-operating with the Lord Jesus Christ* in effecting the redemption of a ruined world. The Holy Spirit qualified the man Jesus for his work, and upheld him in it, and wrought miracles by him in confirmation of his mission, and raised him up from the dead, and bore witness to him in a visible manner on the day of Pentecost; and from that day to this has been imparting *to the souls of men* the benefits of the Redeemer's sacrifice. By working *faith* in our hearts, he enables us to apply to ourselves the promises of God, and thereby to obtain an interest in all that Christ has done and suffered for us. And by such *repeated applications* of the promises to ourselves, he conveys to us all the blessings of grace and glory.

That this *is* the import of the type we can have no doubt, since God himself has so explained it[a].]

This may suffice for a general explanation of the

[a] Heb. ix. 13, 14. We see particularly in this passage, what was the import of the living water with which the ashes were mixed: it intimated, that "Christ offered himself *through the eternal Spirit*."

ordinance: but we shall gain a still clearer insight into it by considering,

II. Its instructive tendency—

We do not apprehend that any Jew, perhaps not even Moses himself, could discover in it all that we do. Yet we would be extremely cautious of indulging our fancy, or of deducing from the ordinance any instruction which it is not well fitted to convey. We certainly keep within the bounds of sober interpretation, when we say, that we may learn from it,

1. Our universal need of a remedy against the defilement of sin—

[The contracting of defilement from the touch of a dead body, or a bone, or a grave, and the communicating of that defilement to every thing that was touched, and the rendering of that also a means of communicating defilement to others, intimated, that in our present state we cannot but receive defilement from the things around us; and that, whether intentionally or not, we are the means of diffusing the sad contagion of sin. "There is not a man that liveth, and sinneth not:" "in many things we all offend:" so that we may well adopt the language of the Psalmist, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from my secret faults[b]"———Now as every one who was defiled, needed the purification that was appointed, so do we, even the most pure amongst us, need deliverance from guilt and corruption. However careful we are, we cannot plead exemption from the common lot of all: we are "corrupted and corrupters[c]," every one of us; and are greatly indebted to our God, who has graciously appointed means for the purifying of our souls.]

2. The mysterious nature of that remedy prescribed to us in the Gospel–

[Some have said, Where mystery begins, religion ends. We rather would say, that Christianity is altogether a mystery in every part. Look at this typical representation, and say, whether there be no mystery in it. Can we fathom all its depths? or, if enabled by the light of the New Testament to declare its import, can we reduce it all to the dictates of reason? Look at the truths that are shadowed forth; is there nothing mysterious in them? Think of God's only dear Son, "in whom was no sin, becoming sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Think of the Holy Ghost, the third Person in the ever-blessed Trinity, concurring

[b] Ps. xix. 12. [c] Isai. i. 4.

with him in his work, and exercising his almighty power to render it effectual for our good. Is there no mystery in all this? Truly, "*great* is the mystery of godliness:" and the more we contemplate it, the more shall we be constrained to exclaim with the Apostle, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"]

3. The precise manner in which that remedy becomes effectual—

[What was it that rendered the ordinance effectual for the purifying of an unclean person? Was there any necessary connexion between sprinkling the ashes of an heifer upon a person, and the cleansing him from sin? None at all. It was the divine appointment, and that only, that gave efficacy to it. Indeed, so far was it from being able of itself to cleanse a person from sin, that the very observance of the ordinance rendered every person unclean that was engaged in it. The killing of the heifer, the sprinkling of its blood, the burning of it, and the gathering up of the ashes, rendered all the persons who were occupied in those duties, unclean until the evening; and laid them under a necessity of washing both their body and their clothes, in order to their purification from the defilement they had contracted. All this shewed clearly enough that the ordinance in itself had no purifying power: it went further; it intimated, that neither could evangelical obedience cleanse us from sin: we cannot exercise repentance or faith, but we contract guilt through the imperfection of our graces: "our tears," as a pious prelate expresses it, "need to be washed, and our repentances to be repented of." There is no virtue in them to cleanse us from sin: nay, there is no necessary connexion between the exercise of those graces in us, and the removal of guilt from our souls. If the devils were to repent, or to believe, we have no authority to say that they must therefore be restored to the state from which they fell: and, independent of the divine appointment, there is no more connexion between the death of Christ and *our* salvation, than between the same event and *theirs*. It is from the divine appointment only that the Gospel derives its power to save. It was from that source alone that the rod of Moses had power to divide the sea, or the brasen serpent to heal the wounded Israelites, or the waters of Jordan to cure Naaman of his leprosy: and consequently, if any of us obtain salvation, all ground of glorying in ourselves must be for ever excluded: our repentance, our faith, our obedience are necessary, as the sprinkling of the ashes; but the ultimate effect, namely, the salvation of our souls, is altogether the free gift of God for Christ's sake.

Unless we view this matter aright, we shall never know how

entirely we are indebted to the free grace of God, or be sufficiently on our guard against self-preference and self-complacency.]

4. The indispensable necessity of resorting to it—

[If any person had contracted uncleanness, it signified nothing *how* the defilement came: he was unclean; and he must purify himself in the appointed way: and, if he refused to do so, he must be cut off. If, previous to his purification, he should presume to enter into the sanctuary, the sanctuary itself would be defiled.

Thus whether a man have sinned in a greater or less degree, he must seek to be cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ: he must embrace the Gospel as his only hope. It will be in vain to plead, that his sins have been small and unintentional, and that he does not deserve the wrath of God: one question only will be asked, "Is he a sinner? has he at any time, or in any way, contracted the smallest measure of defilement?" If any man be so free from sin, as never to have committed it once in his whole life, in thought, word, or deed, let him reject the Gospel as unsuited to his state: but if the smallest evil have ever been indulged in his heart, he must submit to the purification that is prescribed. No other can be substituted in its place. He may say, as Naaman, "Are not the waters of Abana and Pharpar as good as those of Jordan?" But, allowing them to be as good, they will not have the same effect, because they are not appointed of God to that end. I say then to every child of man, "Repent, and believe the Gospel:" "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out:" "He that believeth shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned." Think not to come to God in any other way than this; for heaven itself would be defiled by your admission thither, if you were not first purged from your sins by the blood and Spirit of Christ.]

5. The efficacy of it when duly applied—

[Every person who complied with the ordinance, was cleansed: and every one who has the blood and Spirit of Christ sprinkled on his soul, shall "be saved with an everlasting salvation." The argument which the Apostle uses in a fore-cited passage[d], deserves to be attentively considered. It is this; "If the legal purification availed for the smallest good, how shall not the gospel method of purification avail for the greatest?" In this argument there would be no force at all, if only logically considered: but, if considered in connexion with the deep mysteries of the Gospel, it has all the force of demonstration. Consider who it was, whose blood was offered unto God for us? it was the blood of his co-equal, co-eternal Son. Consider who

[d] Heb. ix. 13, 14.

that Agent was, who co-operated with him in the making of this offering? it was "The Eternal Spirit," who, with the Father and the Son, is the one Supreme God. Consider these things, I say, and nothing will be too great for us to expect, if only we come to God in his appointed way. Yes; our consciences shall be purged from guilt, and our souls be transformed into the divine image. Whatever our sins may have been, even "though of a crimson dye, they shall be made white as snow." Let the sinner view an unclean person under the law, excluded from the society of his dearest friends, and prohibited from all access to the sanctuary; and then, on the renewed sprinkling of the ashes, instantly brought into communion with the Lord's people, and invested with the privilege of drawing nigh to God: let him view this, I say, and he has a striking representation of the change that shall take place in his own condition, the very moment he is interested in the atonement of Christ. He shall instantly be numbered with the saints below, and assuredly be fellow-heir with "the saints in light." Let then this sprinkling be performed without delay: exercise faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Go to your great High-Priest, and say, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." But remember, that you must repeat this sprinkling from day to day. The unclean person was to be sprinkled on the third day, and on the seventh: so must we be from time to time, even to the latest period of our lives.

Consider, Brethren, what I say; "and the Lord give you understanding in all things."]

## CLXVI.

### MOSES AND AARON SENTENCED TO DIE IN THE WILDERNESS.

Numb. xx. 12. *And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*

SCARCELY shall we find any portion of sacred history that is more calculated to affect a pious mind, than this. When we see judgments inflicted on the rebellious Israelites, we acknowledge without hesitation the justice and equity of God: we regret indeed that their impieties called for such severity; but we approve of the severity itself, or rather, regard it as lenient, in comparison of their deserts. But here our proud hearts are almost ready to revolt, and to exclaim, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" "Is it thus that God deals with his chosen servants,

who for forty years have been indefatigable in his service? Does he thus for one offence exclude them from the promised land, to the possession of which they had looked forward with such ardent desire and assured expectation?" But we are soon silenced with that unanswerable question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" We are very incompetent to determine, what it becomes the Divine Majesty to do. But though we are not to sit in judgment on his dispensations, we may with propriety inquire into the reasons of them, if only we do so with a view to vindicate his ways, and to gain that instruction which they are intended to convey. Let us then, whilst contemplating the exclusion of Moses and Aaron from the land of Canaan, consider,

I. The offence they committed—

Slight as it may appear to us, it was a complicated offence—

There was in it a mixture of,

1. Irreverence—

["God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him[a]." But on this occasion Moses and Aaron seem to have forgotten that they were in the presence of God, or that there was any necessity to lead the murmurers to a becoming affiance in him. They should have reminded the people of his past mercies, and shewn them how to secure the continuance of his favours by penitence and prayer. But, notwithstanding "the glory of the Lord appeared unto them," they omitted, as he complains, "to sanctify him in the eyes of the children of Israel." This was a great offence. They should have remembered, that Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had been devoured by fire before the Lord for irreverently offering common fire in their censers, instead of the fire that was burning on the altar: and that God on that occasion had said, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh unto me, and before all the people I will be glorified[b]." There would therefore have been no ground to arraign the justice of God, even if he had smitten *them* in like manner on this occasion. Their exclusion from Canaan, though grievous, was less than their iniquity deserved.]

2. Anger—

[A certain kind of anger is allowable: nor is it wrong to

[a] Ps. lxxxix. 7. [b] Lev. x. 3.

testify that displeasure in words: but it must not be such an anger as transports us into unbecoming actions or vehement invectives. The expressions used by Moses on this occasion, shew, that his anger was by no means duly moderated. It did not terminate on the offence, but struck at the person of the offenders; towards whom nothing but pity, joined with faithful remonstrances, should have been exercised. Doubtless, his indignation was very hot, when he addressed the people, "Ye rebels:" and in this it is evident that Aaron also was a partaker with him. How sinful this was, we may judge from that declaration of our Lord, that "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire[c]." Here then again we see that their exclusion from Canaan was justly merited.]

3. Disobedience—

[God had commanded Moses to "*speak* to the rock:" but Moses, in the paroxysm of his anger, *smote* it, yea "smote it twice." Had Moses forgotten how strict God's injunctions had been respecting the furniture of the tabernacle, that every the smallest vessel or pin should be "made according to the pattern shewn to him in the mount?" Had he forgotten that, when bounds were set round Mount Sinai, even a beast, if he should pass them, was to be pierced through with a dart? Had he and Aaron forgotten how strictly every the minutest service of the sanctuary was enjoined on the pain of death? How then could they dare thus to violate the divine commands? God himself complains of this as an act of direct *rebellion* against him[d]. Who then can wonder that God saw fit to mark it with a testimony of his displeasure? It is not improbable that God, in ordering Moses to *speak* to the rock, intended to reprove the Israelites, when they saw the rocks themselves more obedient to the divine command than they. But the disobedience of Moses altogether defeated this intention: yea, it was calculated to convey a most erroneous idea to those who understood the mystical import of this dispensation. The rock that had been smitten nine and thirty years before was a type of Christ, from whom, as smitten for our offences, the waters of life and salvation flow[e]. But Christ was not to be smitten *twice*: "he was *once* offered to bear the sins of many:" and it is henceforth by *speaking* to him, and addressing him in prayer and faith, that we are to receive renewed communications of his grace and mercy. But Moses and Aaron overlooked all this, (for what will not people forget, when under the influence of passion?) and justly brought upon themselves this severe rebuke.]

[c] Compare ver. 10, 11. with Matt. v. 22.

[d] ver. 21. with Numb. xxvii. 14. [e] Exod. xvii. 6. with 1 Cor. x. 4.

4. Unbelief—

[Of this in particular God accuses them; "Ye believed me not, to sanctify me." Whether they doubted the efficacy of a *word*, and therefore *smote* the rock; or whether they acted in their own strength, expecting the effect to be produced by their own act of striking the rock, instead of regarding God alone as the author of the mercy, we cannot say: we rather incline to the latter opinion, because of the emphatic manner in which they addressed the Israelites; "Ye rebels, must WE fetch you water out of this rock?" In either case they were under the influence of unbelief: for, distrust of God, or creature-confidence, are equally the effects of unbelief: the one characterized the conduct of those Israelites who were afraid to go up to take possession of the promised land; and the other, those who went up in their own strength, when God had refused to go before them. This was the offence which excluded the whole nation from the promised land: "they could not enter in because of unbelief[f]:" no wonder therefore, that, when Moses and Aaron were guilty of it, they were involved in the common lot.]

What has been said may suffice to shew that their offence was not so light as it may at first sight appear to be: but its enormity will be best seen in,

II. The punishment inflicted for it—

The sentence denounced against them was, that they should die in the wilderness, and be denied the privilege of leading the people into the promised land. This was,

1. An awful sentence—

[How distressing it was to them, we may judge from the prayer of Moses, who sought to have the sentence reversed: "O Lord God, I pray thee let me go over and see the good land!" But, as Moses himself tells us, "God was wroth with him, and would not hear him[g]." How loudly does this speak to *us!* If we reflect on the length of time that they had served the Lord; the exemplary manner in which they had conducted themselves; (oftentimes at the peril of their lives expostulating with the people, and seeking to avert the wrath of God from them;) and that this, as it respected Moses at least, was almost the only fault that he had committed: if we at the same time consider, how grievous the disappointment must have been to them to have all their hopes and expectations frustrated, now that they had nearly completed the destined period of their wanderings; truly we cannot but see in this dispensation the evil and bitterness of sin; and feel the importance of that

[f] Heb. iii. 19. [g] Deut. iii. 23—26.

admonition, "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of us should seem to come short of it[h]."

We know indeed that this sentence of exclusion did not extend to the Canaan that is above: and it is probable that many others who died in the wilderness, were therefore "judged and chastened of the Lord, that they might *not* be condemned with the world[i]:" nevertheless the record of their failure is "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come[k]:" and as the great body of the nation were "examples unto us, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted," so may the example of Moses in particular teach us, that "if the righteous turn away from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die[l]." Indeed this is the very lesson which St. Paul himself inculcates from the exclusion of the Israelites at large, and which is doubly forcible when arising from the failure of Moses; "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall[m]." Were a man as eminent as Paul himself, it would behove him to use the same vigilance as he; "keeping under his body, and bringing it into subjection, lest by any means, after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway[n]." Not he that "runneth well for a season," but "he that endureth to the end, shall be saved."]

2. An instructive sentence—

[Besides the general idea above suggested, there are several very important things prefigured in this dispensation.

First, it intimated *the insufficiency of the moral law to justify us.* Moses, the meekest of all the human race, had once "spoken unadvisedly with his lips[o];" and for that one trespass was excluded from the promised land[p]. Now, if we consider the typical nature of the whole Mosaic economy, we shall not wonder, that he, whose whole office and ministry were typical, was ordained to instruct us even by his death. In fact, he was himself a comment on his own law: *that* denounced every one "cursed, who continued not in all things that were written in the book of the law to do them;" and he, for one offence, was doomed to die among the unbelieving Israelites, and thereby to shew, that "by the deeds of the law should no flesh be justified[q]."

Let this be remembered by us: the law condemns us as truly for one offence as for a thousand[r]: it is of excellent use to lead us through the wilderness; but it never can bring us into

[h] Heb. iv. 1. [i] 1 Cor. xi. 32. [k] 1 Cor. x. 11.
[l] Ezek. xviii. 24. [m] 1 Cor. x. 12. [n] 1 Cor. ix. 27.
[o] Ps. cvi. 33. [p] Deut. xxxii. 48—51.
[q] Rom. iii. 20. Gal. iii. 10, 16. [r] Jam. ii. 10.

Canaan: and, if ever we would be saved at all, we must trust, not in our own obedience to the law, but in Him who fulfilled it, and redeemed us from its curse[s].

Next, it instructs us in *the transitory nature of the ceremonial law.* Before the sentence was to be executed on Aaron, he was to go up to the top of Mount Hor, and there to be stripped of his priestly garments, which Moses was to put upon Eleazar his son[t]. By this transfer of the priesthood it was shewn, that this typical priesthood was not to endure for ever, but to be be transferred from one generation to another, till at last it should be superseded by Him, who was to be "a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec." This is no fanciful construction: it is the very idea suggested by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews; who tells us, that the law was disannulled for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof: the priests, its ministers, being unable to continue by reason of death, yielded up their office to "Him who liveth for evermore:" and thus the whole legal economy, not being able to make any one perfect, gave way to that better hope which does[u]. Thus, I say, Aaron's death illustrated the weakness of the ceremonial law, as the death of Moses did that of the moral law. Neither could introduce any one to the land of Canaan; but the one "waxed old and vanished away[x];" and the other remained only to curse and to condemn all who were under its power[y].

The last truth which this dispensation preaches to us is, that *Christ is the appointed Saviour of the world.* Moses and Aaron, being doomed to die in the wilderness, and Miriam having already died at the commencement of this fortieth year, the people were by God's command committed to the care and government of Joshua[z]. *He* was to subdue all their enemies before them, and to put the Israelites into a complete possession of the promised land. Who does not recognise in *him* the Lord Jesus Christ. Their very names are precisely the same in the Greek language: and their offices are the same. Jesus is "the Captain of our salvation:" God has given all his people into *his* hands, that he may give eternal life unto as many as the Father hath given him[a]. Know then, all ye who are going towards the promised land, to whom you must look for direction, support, and victory. Jesus is "given to be a Leader and Commander to his people:" and they who fight under his banners, shall be "more than conquerors." In a word, the moral "law was a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ;" and the ceremonial law was a visible representation to shadow him

[s] Rom. viii. 3. and Gal. iii. 13.
[t] ver. 25—28.
[u] Heb. vii. 18, 19, 23, 24.
[x] Heb. viii. 13.
[y] Rom. vii. 10. 2 Cor. iii. 9.
[z] Numb. xxvii. 18—23.
[a] John xvii. 2.

forth: and in reference to both of them it may be said, "He was the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth[b]."]

TO CONCLUDE—

[Let us receive from this history the instruction it was intended to convey. Let us learn from it the excellency of the Gospel, which reveals the Saviour to us; and let us see the importance of adorning it by a suitable conduct and conversation; ever remembering, that to them, and them only, who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honour and immortality, will eternal life be assigned[c].]

[b] Rom. x. 4. [c] Rom. ii. 6, 7.

## CLXVII.

### DEATH OF AARON.

Numb. xx. 27, 28. *And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount.*

THE lapse of time is so gradual and silent, that, for the most part, it escapes our observation: but there are seasons and occurrences[a] which almost irresistibly force upon us the conviction that our days are coming to a close. The history before us is particularly calculated to impress our minds with this thought. It was not till an advanced period of life that Moses and Aaron were called to their sacred office: and when, contrary to their expectation, they were turned back into the wilderness, and doomed to sojourn there during the space of forty years, it would appear as though that time would scarcely ever expire. But years rolled on; the destined period arrived; and death, which had nearly completed its work in the destruction of all the men who had come out of Egypt, received a new commission against those most distinguished servants of the Lord. At the commencement of the fortieth year, Miriam died: before it was half expired, Aaron too was cut off; and,

[a] If this were used as a subject for the *New Year*, or for a *Funeral*, the mention of that particular occasion would be proper.

before its termination, Moses himself also was constrained to yield to the stroke of death. In the death of Aaron, to which we would now call your attention, there are two things more especially to be noticed;

I. The transfer of his office—

Moses received an order to "strip off Aaron's garments, and to put them on Eleazar his son." That order was now executed: and in the execution of it we may see the true nature of that law, of which Aaron was the chief minister. We may see,

1. That it could not save—

[In the preceding Discourse we have observed, that the sentence of death passed on Moses, marked the insufficiency of the *moral* law to justify: and now we observe, that the transfer of Aaron's priesthood marked the same respecting the *ceremonial* law. The ceremonial law was never designed to make any *real* satisfaction for sin. The annual repetition of the same sacrifices shewed, that they had not fully prevailed for the removal of guilt. As they could not satisfy divine justice, so neither could they satisfy the consciences of those who offered them: "they were remembrances of sin," calculated to preserve a sense of guilt upon the conscience, and to direct the people to that great Sacrifice, which should in due time be offered for the sins of the whole world[b]. This, I say, was shadowed forth in the death of Aaron: for, if those sacrifices which he had offered could really atone for sin, why were they not accepted for *his* sin; or why was not some fresh sacrifice appointed for it? They could not so much as avert from him a temporal punishment, or procure for him an admission into the earthly Canaan: how then could they prevail for the removal of eternal punishment, and for the admission of sinners into the heavenly land? The Apostle tells us, that "it was not possible for the blood of bulls and of goats to take away sin:" nor could a more striking evidence of its inefficiency be conceived, than that which was exhibited in the event before us.]

2. That it was not to continue—

[The sentence of death denounced against Aaron, manifested, as we have before shewn, that the law itself was in due time to be disannulled[c]. The stripping off of Aaron's garments, and putting of them upon Eleazar, still more clearly marked

[b] Heb. x. 1—4. and ix. 9, 10.

[c] See the preceding Discourse. If this subject were taken alone, that part of it which illustrates this idea should, *in substance*, be introduced in this place.

the changeableness of Aaron's priesthood; and intimated, that it should successively devolve on dying men, till HE should arrive, who should never die, but "be a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec."

But the manner in which this transfer was carried into execution deserves particular attention, inasmuch as it was peculiarly calculated to give the people an insight into the whole nature and design of the ceremonial law. Whether the ceremony passed in the sight of all the congregation or not, we cannot say: but they were certainly informed of what was about to take place on the arrival of Moses and Aaron at the destined spot. Now Moses was the person who, by God's appointment, had put the priestly garments on Aaron, forty years before[d]; and he also was the person appointed to strip them off. Was this an accidental circumstance, without any mystical design? Can we suppose that, in a dispensation which was altogether figurative, such a singular fact as this was devoid of meaning? No: it was replete with instruction. We dread exceedingly the indulgence of fancy in interpreting the Scriptures; but we are persuaded that a very deep mystery was shadowed forth on this occasion. Moses was the representative of the law, as Aaron was of our great High-Priest. Now it was the law which made any priesthood necessary. If the law had not existed, there had been no transgression: if that had not denounced a curse for sin, there had been no need of an High-Priest to make atonement for sin: and if there had been no need of a *real* sacrifice, there had been no occasion for either a priesthood or sacrifices to *shadow* it forth. The law then called forth, if I may so speak, the Lord Jesus Christ to his office: and therefore Moses put the priestly garments on him who was to prefigure Christ. But the same law which rendered a *real* atonement necessary, made the *figurative* priesthood wholly ineffectual: its demands were too high to be satisfied with mere carnal ordinances: there was nothing in a ceremonial observance that could be accepted as a fulfilment of its injunctions; nor was there any thing in the blood of a beast that could compensate for the violation of them: therefore, to shew that nothing but the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ could be of any avail, the same hand that put the shadowy garments upon Aaron must strip them off again.

Thus in this transaction are we taught, not only that the ceremonial law was a mere temporary appointment, but that men should look through it to Him whom it shadowed forth. The language of it was, in effect, similar to that of the Apostle; "I through the law am dead to the law[e];" that is, "I, through the strictness of the moral law, am cut off from all hopes of acceptance with God by any obedience to its commands; yea,

[d] Exod. xxix. 4—7. [e] Gal. ii. 19.

I despair of obtaining salvation by any works either of the ceremonial or moral law; and I trust wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ: I seek to be justified solely and altogether by faith in him."]

Whilst our minds are instructed by the transfer of Aaron's office to Eleazar his son, our hearts cannot but be affected by,

II. The surrender of his soul—

"The time was come when his spirit must now return unto God who gave it." He goes up to Mount Hor, the appointed place, where he must lay down his mortal body, and from whence he must enter into the presence of his God. In this last scene of his life there is much that is worthy of observation:

1. The occasion was awful—

[Aaron had sinned; and for that sin he must die. We doubt not indeed but that he found mercy before God; but still he died on account of his transgression: his death was the punishment of sin[f]. This, in fact, is true respecting every one that dies: though in some respects death may be numbered among the Christian's treasures, yet in other points of view it must still be regarded as an enemy[g], and a punishment for sin. In this light it must be considered even by the most exalted Christian, no less than by the most ungodly; "his body is dead because of sin, even though his spirit be life because of righteousness[h]."

But in the death of this eminent saint we have a most instructive lesson. It was doubtless intended as a warning to all who profess themselves the servants of God. Like Lot's wife, it speaks to all succeeding generations, and declares the danger of departing from God. No length of services will avail us any thing, if at last we yield to temptation, and "fall from our own steadfastness[i]." The death of Aaron shadowed forth that truth which is plainly declared by the prophet Ezekiel, that "if a righteous man turn away from his righteousness and commit iniquity, all his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned; but in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die[k]." Many there are, who, from an attachment to human systems and a zeal for truths of an apparently opposite nature, would almost expunge this passage from the sacred volume: but, whether we can reconcile it with other passages or not, it is true; and every one of us shall find it true at last, that not he who runneth well for a season, but "he who endureth unto the end, shall be saved[l]."]

[f] ver. 24. [g] 1 Cor. xv. 26. [h] Rom. viii. 10.
[i] 2 Pet. iii. 17. [k] Ezek. xviii. 24. [l] Matt. xxiv. 13.

2. The manner [was] dignified—

[Methinks I see Aaron, accompanied by Moses and Eleazar going up to Mount Hor "in the sight of all the congregation:" there is in him no appearance of infidel hardness, or unbelieving fear, or pharisaic confidence: he acquiesces in the divine appointment, and, with meek composure, a firm step, and a cheerful countenance, ascends to meet his God. Thrice happy man! how enviable his state, to be so attended, and to be so assured! What can a saint desire more than this; to have his pious relatives about him; to see, not only those with whom he has moved in sweet harmony for many years, and who are soon to follow him into the eternal world, but his children also, who are coming forward to fill the offices he vacates, and to serve the Lord as he has done before them; to see them around him, I say, in his last hours; to enjoy their prayers; and to bestow on them his parting benedictions? How delightful, in that hour, to "know in whom he has believed," and to be assured that he is "entering into the joy of his Lord!" Such *may* be the state of all; such *ought* to be the state of all. Hear how Peter speaks of his death: "I know that I must shortly put off this my tabernacle[m]." Hear Paul also speaking of his: "I know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, I have an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens:" "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me[n]." Shall it be said, These were Apostles; and we must not expect such attainments as theirs? I answer, These things are the privilege of all: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace[o]."]

3. The event [was] honourable—

[Upon every recurrence of difficulties, the whole people of Israel had vented their spleen against Moses and against Aaron. On some occasions they had been ready to stone these distinguished servants of the Lord. But now that Aaron was taken from them, the whole congregation of Israel bemoaned their loss[p]. Now they call to mind those services, which once they despised. Now they say one to another, 'How often have we seen him fall on his face before God, to implore mercy for us, at the very moment when we were murmuring against him as the source of all our troubles! How did we on a recent occasion see him rushing with his censer into the midst of the plague, to arrest the pestilence in its progress, even at the peril of his own life! Alas, alas, what a friend and father have we lost!' Yes; thus it too generally is; men know their blessings

[m] 2 Pet. i. 14. [n] 2 Cor. v. 1. 2 Tim. iv. 8.
[o] Ps. xxxvii. 37. [p] ver. 29

only by the loss of them. They enjoy a faithful ministry, but will not avail themselves of it, till "the candlestick is removed," and the privileges, which they have slighted, are withdrawn. The same is too often experienced by children who have neglected the admonitions of their parents, and servants who have disregarded the instructions of their masters. Happy they, who "know the day of their visitation," and "walk in the light before the night cometh!" To those indeed who die, it is comforting to know that they shall leave such a testimony behind them: but, when we consider the augmented guilt and misery of those who have slighted our admonitions, our sorrow for them preponderates, and turns our self-congratulations into tender sympathy and grief: for the greater our exertions were for their salvation, the more certainly shall we appear as swift witnesses against them, to increase and aggravate their condemnation.]

ADDRESS—

What if God were now to issue the command to any one of us, "Go up to thy bed, and die?" how would it be received amongst us? Should we welcome such an order? Should we rejoice that the period was arrived for our dismission from the body, and for our entrance into the presence of our God? Such an order will assuredly be soon given to every one of us: the old and the young, the rich and the poor, those who have travelled all through the wilderness, and those who have but just entered into it, may have it said to them within a few hours, "This night is thy soul required of thee." But, however men might receive the summons, its consequences to them would be widely different, according as they were prepared, or unprepared, to meet their God. Think,

1. Thou who art regardless of thine eternal state—

[Thou art now perhaps adorned in costly array, and filling some high station; perhaps, if not crowned with a mitre, like Aaron, at least officiating at the altar of thy God. But thine honours and thine ornaments must all be laid aside; and thine office, together with thy wealth, must be transferred to others. "Naked camest thou into the world, and naked must thou go from it." But whither must thou go? To heaven? Alas! persons of your description can find no admittance there. Thou wilt be excluded, like the foolish virgins, who had no oil in their lamps. O think, from what thou wilt be excluded: not from an earthly Canaan, but from heaven itself; and not, to be merely bereaved of good, but to bewail thy misery in hell

for ever! Ah! fearful thought! The Lord grant that it may sink down into all our hearts, and stir us up to "flee from the wrath to come!"

Do any inquire, What shall we do to be saved? My answer is, There is an High-Priest, who dieth not; or rather, I should say, who, though once he died on Mount Calvary, now "liveth, and behold he is alive for evermore." It is to him that Moses directed you when he stripped off Aaron's robes; and to him Aaron himself directed you, when he surrendered up his soul. The typical priests being inefficient, "were not suffered to continue by reason of death: but the Lord Jesus hath an unchangeable priesthood; and is therefore able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth[q]." Believe in him, and the sting of death shall be removed: thou shalt have peace with God through his atoning blood; and, when taken hence, shalt be transported on the wings of angels to Abraham's bosom.]

2. Thou who professest religion, yet art living at a distance from thy God—

[Let us suppose for a moment, thou art not so far from God, but that thou shalt find mercy at his hands in the last day: still it would be very painful to die under a cloud, and to leave thy surviving friends doubtful of thy state. Yet this is the best that thou canst expect, whilst thou art relaxing thy diligence, and "the things which remain in thee are ready to die." But there is reason to fear that thou art "drawing back unto perdition," and that "thy last end will be worse than thy beginning." Think not that this is an uncommon case: there are many who "seem to be religious, and yet deceive their own souls." How terrible then will be your disappointment, if, after walking, perhaps twenty, or, like Aaron, forty years, in expectation of reaching the promised land, you come short of it at last! Yet this will be the case with all who dissemble with God[r]. When your minister, who had hoped that you would have been "his joy and crown of rejoicing" for ever, shall inquire, "Where is he?" and your dearest friends also shall ask, "Where is he?" how painful will it be, and perhaps surprising too, to be informed, that you were counted unworthy of that heavenly kingdom[s]! The Lord grant that this picture may never be realised with respect to any of *you!* But I *must* caution you in the words of the Apostle; "Let us fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into God's rest, any of you should seem to come short of it[t]."]

3. Thou sincere and upright Christian—

[What a glorious change will it be to thee, when God shall bid thee to go up unto thy bed and die! Whatever

[q] Heb. vii. 23—25. [r] Job xx. 4—7. [s] Job xx. 7. [t] Heb. iv. 1.

honours thou possessest here, thou needest feel no regret at parting with them. Thou hast found thy trials in this wilderness great and manifold: and happy mayest thou be to go unto the rest that remaineth for thee. Thou hast no need to be afraid of death: it should be regarded only as the stripping off of thy garments, to retire to rest; or rather, as the being "unclothed, in order to be clothed upon, that mortality may be swallowed up of life[u]." Go forward then in daily expectation of thy summons: yea, be daily "looking for, and hasting unto, the coming of that blessed day[x]," when thou shalt "depart, and be with Christ for ever." Who can conceive the bliss that awaits thee at that hour? To behold Him, "of whom the Law and the Prophets testified," and in whom their testimony received its full accomplishment! To behold Him whom Aaron's love and services but faintly shadowed! Him, "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person!" Were death a thousand times more terrible than it is, it were eagerly to be coveted as an introduction to such bliss. Methinks, impatience were a virtue with such prospects as these: or if you must wait with patience your appointed time, endeavour at least so to live, that, at whatever hour your Lord may come, you may be found ready, and have "an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ[y]."]

[u] 2 Cor. v. 4. [x] 2 Pet. iii. 12. [y] 2 Pet. i. 11.

## CLXVIII.

### THE ISRAELITES DISCOURAGED BY THE WAY.

Numb. xxi. 4. *And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.*

THE history of human nature is nearly the same in all ages. Successive generations ought progressively to advance in wisdom, because they have the advantage of others' experience. But youth will not avail themselves of the instructions of their forefathers: they will go forward in their own ways; exactly as if they had no compass whereby to steer, nor any chart of the rocks and shoals, on which so many thousands have been shipwrecked. "The way of their predecessors has been folly; and yet their posterity, in practice at least, applaud their saying." A new generation had been born in the wilderness since the departure of the Israelites from the land of Egypt; and they had ample means of information

respecting the rebellious conduct of their fathers, and the chastisements inflicted on account of it: yet on similar occasions they constantly acted in a similar manner, murmuring and complaining as soon as any new trial arose, and wishing themselves dead, to get rid of their present troubles. Thus it was with them at this time. We propose to inquire into,

I. The causes of their discouragement—

Doubtless, to those who could not implicitly confide in the wisdom and goodness of God, there was ground for discouragement. There was,

1. A perplexing providence—

[The period fixed for their entrance into Canaan was nearly arrived. They had just had a severe engagement with one of the Canaanitish kings, who had come forth against them with all his forces; and, after suffering a partial defeat, had entirely vanquished him. But they were not suffered to follow up their success, or to proceed to the immediate invasion of his land. On the contrary, having been refused permission to pass through the territories of the king of Edom, they were directed to "compass his whole land, and to go back to the Red Sea," perhaps as far as to Ezion-gaber[a]. This was after they had been thirty-nine years and six months in the wilderness; after two of their leaders, Miriam and Aaron, were taken from them by death; and when there remained but six months to the time fixed for their entrance into the promised land. How unaccountable did this appear! Must they wait to be attacked in the wilderness, and never be permitted to reap the reward of victory? Must they wait in the wilderness till their enemies should be willing to resign their land? Had God forgotten his promise, or determined that they should spend another forty years in the wilderness? If the promise was to be fulfilled, why give them the trouble of traversing the wilderness again? If it was not to be fulfilled, they had better die at once, than protract a miserable existence under such vexatious and cruel disappointments.

Whilst they viewed the dispensation in this light, we do not wonder that "their soul was much discouraged."

In truth, this is a very common source of discouragement to ourselves. Persons, on their first commencement of their journey heaven-ward, are apt to be sanguine, and to expect that they shall speedily arrive at the promised land. At one time they seem near it, but are turned back again, in order that by a long course of trials, they may be better prepared to enjoy it.

[a] Deut. ii. 8.

At another time they seem almost to possess it; and then, not long after, find themselves at a greater distance from it than ever. Thus "hope deferred maketh their heart sick:" and being disappointed in their expectations, they yield to great dejection of mind: 'If I am not of the number of God's people, whence have I these desires? if I am, why have I not those attainments?'

The same disquietude arises from perplexities of any kind, where the promise, and the providence, of God appear at variance with each other. Not being able to account for the Lord's dealings towards them, "their souls are cast down, and greatly disquieted within them."]

2. A long protracted trial—

[Forty years of trial was a long period: and the nearer they came to its completion, the longer every day appeared. Hence this fresh order to go back to the Red Sea, and there to recommence their travels, quite overwhelmed them.

And how do long-continued afflictions operate on us? For a season we can bear up under them: but when pains of body, or distress of mind, are lengthened out; when the clouds, instead of dispersing, thicken, and storms of trouble are gathering all around us; then patience is apt to fail, and the mind sinks under its accumulated trials. Because "our strength is small, we faint under our adversity." Even Job, that bright pattern of patience, who after the heaviest losses could say, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord;" even he, I say, fainted at last, and cursed the day of his birth. And he must be endued with an uncommon measure of grace, who under such circumstances can say with Paul, "None of these things move me."]

That we may see how their discouragement operated, let us consider,

II. The effects produced by it—

Their minds being discomposed, they immediately gave way to,

1. A dissatisfied spirit—

[Many were the blessings which they received from the hand of God: they lived by a continual miracle: they were provided with water out of a rock, and with manna daily from the clouds: and yet they complain, "There is no bread, neither is there any water: and our soul lotheth this light bread." Because they did not partake of that variety which the nations around them enjoyed, they were discontented: or rather, because they were offended with the order to go back unto the Red Sea, they were displeased with every thing.

What a picture is this of human frailty! The mind discouraged on one account, looks not out for circumstances of alleviation and comfort, but gives itself up to disquietude and dejection. Temporal blessings lose all their relish. Let even the bread of life be administered to persons in such a frame, they can taste no sweetness in it; the promises of God seem not suited to their case; nor are they sufficient for their support. They "cannot hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely." If they even turn their minds to the right object, it is only to confirm their own doubts, and to augment their own sorrows. Their experience is like that of Asaph, "My sore ran in the night, and ceased not; my soul refused to be comforted: I remembered God, and was troubled[b]."]

2. A murmuring spirit—

[How lamentable to hear them on this occasion accusing God and his servant Moses of having brought them out of Egypt with a view to deceive their expectations and to kill them in the wilderness! But the mind, once thrown off its bias, will stop short of nothing, unless it be restrained by the grace of God[c]. Let any one that has been in deep affliction, look back and see, whether he has not found his mind rise against the immediate authors of his calamities, and ultimately against God himself, for having appointed him so hard a lot[d]? It is true, we do not perhaps *intend* to accuse God; but we do it in effect; because, whoever be the instrument, it is *his* hand that smites. Whether Chaldeans or Sabeans invaded the property of Job, or tempests destroyed his family, the holy sufferer referred the events to God, as their true author. Without God, not a hair of our head could be touched, even if the whole world were confederate against us: when therefore we murmur at the calamities we suffer, we murmur in reality against him who sends them.]

It may be asked perhaps, How could they help yielding to this discouragement? That they might have done so, will appear, whilst we shew,

III. The way in which they should have fortified themselves against it—

It behoved them in this trouble, as indeed in every other, to consider,

1. Whence it came—

[It did not spring out of the dust; it came from God; even from him who had brought them out of Egypt, and had supported them to that very hour. Had they not had evidence enough of God's power and goodness during the nine and

[b] Ps. lxxvii. 2, 3. [c] Isai. viii. 21, 22. [d] Prov. xix. 3.

thirty years that they had continued in the wilderness? and did it not become them to place their confidence in him, though they could not see the immediate reason of his dispensations?

Thus should we do, when tempted to disquietude and despondency: we should say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good:" "the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Yes; "when walking in darkness, we should stay ourselves upon our God;" and determine with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." This was the expedient to which David resorted in the midst of all his troubles, and which he found effectual to compose his mind; "he encouraged himself in the Lord his God[e]."]

2. For what end it was sent—

[God has expressly stated the end for which he tried them so long in the wilderness: it was, "to humble them, and to prove them, that they might know what was in their hearts[f]." And was not the prospect of such an end sufficient to reconcile them to the means used for the attainment of it? Let us also consider the ends for which our afflictions are sent: are they not sent with a view to make us "partakers of his holiness?" Who would be discouraged at his trials, if he reflected on the necessity which there is for them, and the blessed fruit that shall spring from them? Doubtless, they are "not joyous for the present, but grievous:" nevertheless the refiner's fire may well be endured, if only it purge us from our dross, and make us, as "vessels of honour, meet for our Master's use."]

3. The certain issue of it, if duly improved—

[They were well assured that God would fulfil his promises. Even their recent victory over the Canaanites was a pledge and earnest of their future conquests. What if they did not understand the way of the Lord? The direction they had taken at their first departure from Egypt had appeared to their fathers to be erroneous: but it had proved "the right way;" and they should have been satisfied, that this, though alike mysterious, would have a similar issue; and that the number and greatness of their trials would ultimately redound to the glory of their God, and to their own real happiness

Thus we should bear in mind that all our afflictions are working together for good, and that, "light and momentary in themselves, they are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Did we but consider this, we should be content to suffer, till we had filled up our appointed measure: yea, we should even "glory in our tribulations," knowing that we are to be "made perfect by them," and that "they are our appointed way to the kingdom of heaven."]

[e] 1 Sam. xxx. 6. with Ps. xlii. 11. [f] Deut. viii. 2.

APPLICATION—

[Certain it is that "we have need of patience, in order that, when we have done the will of God, we may inherit the promises." But let not any of the sons and daughters of affliction yield to discouragement. If their trials be great, their supports and consolations shall be great also. Are they particularly discouraged at the thought of their weakness and sinfulness? let them recollect, what a fulness of merit and of grace is treasured up for them in Jesus; that "where sin has abounded, his grace shall much more abound; and that his strength shall surely be perfected in their weakness."]

## CLXIX.

### THE BRASEN SERPENT.

Numb. xxi. 8, 9. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole: and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*

IT is said in Scripture, that, "where sin hath abounded, grace shall much more abound." This declaration, if received as a licence for sin, would be pernicious in the extreme: but, if taken as an encouragement to repent, its tendency is most consolatory and beneficial. That God has magnified his grace towards the most unworthy of men, and even taken occasion from their wickedness to display the unbounded extent of his own mercy, is certain: we need only read the history of the Israelites in the wilderness, and we shall be fully convinced of this. Their conduct was most perverse. They were truly a stiff-necked people. Notwithstanding all their experience of God's kindness towards them, they could never confide in him, but were always murmuring, and always rebelling. By their wickedness they brought down upon themselves the divine judgments; but no sooner did they implore forgiveness, than God returned to them in mercy, and put away his judgments far from them. We have a very singular instance of this in the history before us; where we are informed, that God had, on account of their murmur-

ings, sent fiery flying serpents to destroy them; but, on the intercession of Moses, had appointed them an easy remedy, by the use of which their wounds were healed, and their calamities removed.

We propose to consider,

I. The appointment itself—

The need of God's interposition was exceeding urgent—

[The wilderness abounded with serpents, such as the camp was now infested with[a]. They were of a very malignant nature, causing by their bite a fatal inflammation[b]. Multitudes of the people had been bitten by them: many were dying; and many were already dead. In vain did any of them seek an antidote against the venom, with which they were in hourly expectation of being infected: nor could any means be devised to abate its force. What then could the people do? To arm themselves against the danger, was impossible: they were assailable on every side: the serpents being winged, their assaults were irresistible. In this extremity, they apply themselves to Him, who alone was able to deliver. They humble themselves before their God; and they entreat Moses to intercede for them. If God have not mercy on them, they must all perish. Such was the extremity to which they were reduced.]

But the manner in which he interposed was strange and unaccountable—

[God ordered a serpent to be made of brass, as like as possible to those which bit the people: and that serpent he commanded to be erected on a pole, in order that the wounded persons might look unto it and be healed. But what connexion was there between the means and the end? Of what use could a piece of brass be, or what could it signify of what shape it was? Of what service could it be to look upon it? If it were used in a way of friction; or if it were reduced to powder and swallowed; or any mixture were made with an infusion of brass in it; one might suppose it possible that such a prescription might be of some use: there might be some affinity between the remedy and the disease: but, when such an order as that in our text was given, it seemed rather as if God were only "laughing at their calamity, and mocking, now that their fear was come."]

Strange however as this might appear at the time, the reason of it is clear to us, who know,

[a] Deut. viii. 15.

[b] They are probably called "fiery" on *this* account, rather than from their colour.

II. The mystery contained in it—

That the deepest mysteries of our holy religion were shadowed forth by it, we are well assured, because our blessed Lord has expressly referred to it as illustrative and explanatory of them. Let us, for distinctness' sake, consider,

1. The provision made—

[God ordered that a brasen serpent should be made like unto the other serpents, (but without their venom;) and that it should be erected on a pole in the midst of the camp. And herein was a great mystery. What, I would ask, is the provision which God has made for the recovery of a ruined world? Has he not sent his only dear Son into the world, to be made "in the likeness of sinful flesh," yea, to be "made in all things like unto us, sin only excepted[c]?" Has he not caused that glorious Person to be suspended on a cross, and to yield up his own life a sacrifice for sin? Has he not moreover commanded that in every place, and in every age, that adorable Saviour should, by the preaching of the everlasting Gospel, be "evidently set forth crucified before the eyes of men[d]?" Here then we behold that which was prefigured by the brasen serpent. In affirming this, we speak only what our Lord himself has declared[e]. Indeed on several different occasions did he refer to this type, as to receive in due season its accomplishment in him[f]. O how are we indebted to God for the light of his blessed Gospel! Little did the Israelites know what a stupendous mercy was here exhibited to their view. Doubtless, as a mere ordinance for the healing of their bodies, they would be thankful for it; but how thankful should *we* be, who see in it such a wonderful provision for our souls! Let us contemplate it: God's co-equal, co-eternal Son, Jehovah's Fellow, made incarnate! The Deity himself assuming our nature with all its sinless infirmities, and dying an accursed death upon the cross! and this too for the salvation of his own rebellious creatures! O let us never for one moment forget, that this is the means which God has appointed for our deliverance from death and hell: let us contemplate it, till our hearts are altogether absorbed in wonder, love, and praise.]

2. The direction given—

[The only thing which the Israelites had to do, was, to *look* unto the brasen serpent. There was nothing else required of them: they were not first to heal themselves in part; or to apply any other remedy in conjunction with this: nor

[c] Rom. viii. 3. with Heb. ii. 17. and iv. 15. [d] Gal. iii. 1.
[e] John iii. 14. [f] John viii. 28. and xii. 32.

were they to do any thing either to merit, or to increase its efficacy: they were simply to look unto the serpent, as God's ordinance for their recovery. Here then we behold a further mystery. Never from the foundation of the world was the way of salvation more plainly, more fully, or more intelligibly declared, than in this simple method of obtaining the desired blessing. Salvation is only and entirely by faith in Christ. The direction which Christ himself gives us by the Prophet Isaiah, is this: "*Look* unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else[g]." And when he sent forth his disciples to preach his Gospel, he especially charged them to declare, that "he who believed, should be saved; and he who believed not, should be damned[h]." Many other things indeed he requires of his people: he requires that they should *repent*, in order to evince that they truly desire mercy; and that they should *obey*, in order to manifest that they have obtained mercy; but both their repentance and obedience are carefully excluded from the office of justifying: justification is invariably declared to be by faith alone. "It is by faith in order that it may be by grace[i]:" and, when we have learned how much the Israelites did for the healing of their bodies, then we shall know how much our own works are to procure the healing of our souls. In this view the type before us is singularly instructive: it is so plain, that it is obvious to the meanest apprehension; so comprehensive, that nothing can be added for the elucidation of it; and so authenticated, that scepticism itself cannot doubt either its reference or its accomplishment.]

3. The effect produced—

[If any despised the remedy, they died: whereas not a single instance occurred, throughout all the camp of Israel, of any person resorting to it in vain. However desperate his state was, however distant he might be from the serpent, or however indistinctly he beheld it, the effect was still the same; every person who looked to it as God's ordinance for the healing of his wounds, was healed by it; he was healed immediately, and he was healed perfectly. The man that can see no mystery here, is blind indeed. We may defy the ingenuity of men or angels to devise any means whereby the efficacy of faith in Christ should be more clearly ascertained. Plain indeed is that declaration of St. Paul, "All that believe, are justified from all things[k]:" but, plain as it is, it does not so forcibly strike the mind, as does the typical representation in our text. All the questions that can arise respecting the nature and the

[g] Isai. xlv. 22. [h] Mark xvi. 16.
[i] John iii. 15. with Rom. iv. 16. and xi. 6. and Eph. ii. 8, 9.
[k] Acts xiii. 39.

efficacy of faith, are here distinctly answered. If suppositions are made which can never be verified, no wonder if difficulties occur which cannot be solved: but let us only remember, that faith is a looking to Christ for salvation, and that *that* faith is uniformly and universally productive of good works; and then we can no more doubt its efficacy to save the soul, than we can doubt the veracity of God. We inquire not, whether that faith be strong or weak; (though doubtless the stronger it is, the more abundant will be its fruits:) we only ask, whether it be genuine and unfeigned; and then we do not hesitate to affirm, that the possessor of it "shall be saved:" "he shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end[l]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are averse to this method of salvation—

[Many there are to whom the doctrine of salvation by faith alone is an object of disgust. It was so in the first ages of Christianity; and it is so still to the greater part of the Christian world. But though the cross of Christ is still, as formerly, "to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness," yet is it at this time, as it was then, "the power of God and the wisdom of God[m]." If it be objected, that to be saved by faith alone, and by faith in One who saved not himself, appears absurd; we answer, That such an objection might with just as much reason have been urged against the healing of dying men by the sight of a brasen serpent: and that it is not for us to prescribe to God in what way he shall save a ruined world. It is not for us to dictate, but obey. Were there therefore really as little connexion between the means and the end in the gospel salvation, as there was in the typical representation of it, it would still be our duty thankfully to submit to the remedy proposed. But this is not the case: it would be easy to shew that there is a wonderful suitableness between the death of Christ as an atonement for sin, and the mercy vouchsafed to us for his sake: nor is there a less suitableness between our exercise of faith in him, and his communication of grace to us. But without entering into that discussion at present, we refer to the type as decisive of the point. "Wash and be clean," was said to Naaman; "Look and be healed," to Israel; "Believe and be saved," to us. This is Christ's message to a guilty world; and "blessed is he who shall not be offended in him."]

2. Those who have experienced its saving benefits—

[The brasen serpent was carried by the Israelites throughout all the remainder of their journey: and, if they had been

[l] Acts xvi. 31. with Isai. xlv. 17. [m] 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.

bitten again by the fiery serpents, they would doubtless have had recourse again to the remedy, which they had once found to be effectual. The need of repeated applications to *our* remedy is daily recurring; and, thanks be to God! its efficacy is undiminished. To all therefore would we repeat the direction before given, "Look unto Christ and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." If those around you doubt, as certainly they will doubt, the efficacy of faith, let them read it in your whole conduct: let them see that your corruptions are mortified, and your evil dispositions are healed. Let them see that there is a difference between you and those around you, and such a difference too, as nothing but faith in Christ can produce. They will be boasting of other remedies, which, in spite of their utmost exertions, they will find ineffectual: but let them see in you the superior excellence of *that*, which God has revealed in his Gospel. Declare to them the way of life: exalt the Lord Jesus in their eyes: commend him to them with your lips; but most of all commend him to them in your lives. In a word, let your whole conversation be a visible comment on those words of the Apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world[n]."]

[n] Gal. vi. 14.

## CLXX.

### BALAAM'S CHARACTER.

Numb. xxii. 18, 19. *And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the Lord will say unto me more.*

THE study of human nature is ever profitable. Much insight into it may be gained from history; much from converse with the world; much from the examination of our own hearts. But that which we acquire from a perusal of the Holy Scriptures is the most clear and certain, because we have all the circumstances in one view before our eyes, and have infallible information respecting the motives and principles by which the different agents were influenced. The character of Balaam is peculiarly instructive. He was a man eminent as a soothsayer: and it was supposed that he could influence the fate, not of

individuals only, but of nations, by his sentence of blessing or malediction. Persons of his description were frequently employed by kings at the commencement of a war, to devote their enemies to destruction: and, among the Romans, an officer was appointed particularly to that office. This man was applied to by Balak, the king of Moab, to come and curse Israel; who, as they feared, would vanquish them all, as easily "as an ox licketh up the grass." This message gave occasion to Balaam to display what was in his heart. We propose to shew you,

I. The inconsistency of Balaam's character—

That we may have a more distinct view of his character, we shall notice the contrariety which there was,

1. Between his sentiments and desires—

[The desires of man by nature are altogether earthly and sensual: but when light breaks in upon his mind, and he is made to see in a measure the evil of such desires, a conflict begins within him. It is in this state that multitudes go on: they see the better path, and approve it in their minds; but they cannot, will not, follow it: there are some gratifications which they know not how to forego, and some interests which they cannot prevail upon themselves to give up; and hence they proceed in a painful opposition to the dictates of their own consciences, being habitually self-convicted and self-condemned. They "hate the light," and, as the Scripture strongly expresses it, "rebel against the light."

Such was the state of Balaam. His views of divine truth were very enlarged, when we consider the age and country in which he lived. He had a considerable knowledge of God and his perfections; yea, of Christ also, together with the kingdom which he should establish upon earth[a]. He was acquainted with the nature of truly spiritual religion[b]; and saw, not only the certainty of a future state, but the certainty, that, in that state, there would be an inconceivable difference between the righteous and the wicked. But still he was a covetous and ambitious man: and as soon as a prospect of gratifying his evil propensities was opened to him, he bore down the better convictions of his own mind, and determinately set himself to do evil.]

2. Between his professions and conduct—

[Who that had heard all the fine speeches which he made respecting his determination to adhere to the will of God, even

[a] Numb. xxiv. 17—19. [b] Mic. vi. 6—8.

though he should be able to gain "an house full of silver and gold" by disobeying it; and his pious advice to Balak, "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God;" who that had seen him apparently so fearful of stirring a step, or speaking a word, without the divine counsel and direction, would not have conceived him to be a pious character? Yet from beginning to the end his conduct was a continued course of horrible impiety. After he had once consulted God, and had received from him a determined answer that "he should *not* go with the messengers, and that he should *not* curse Israel, for that they were, and should be, blessed;" what had he to do, but to dismiss the messengers with a plain, full, determined answer? When the second company of ambassadors came, he should not have listened to them a moment; but should have been as peremptory in his answer to them as to the former. His second application for direction was only an insult to the Divine Majesty, and a spreading of a net for his own feet. God, seeing how bent he was upon the attainment of his own ends, (the acquisition of wealth and honour,) no more interposed with authority to prevent him, but on certain conditions gave him a permission to go. No sooner was a *conditional* permission given, than Balaam, without waiting for the conditions, set out upon his journey. God, in mercy to him, interposed by a miracle to obstruct his way; and caused a dumb ass to reprove him[c]: but even this produced nothing more than a momentary conviction of his sin, which however he was still determined to persist in: and, having obtained from the angel, what he construed into a permission to proceed, but which was rather a declaration that the ends of his journey should be defeated; (for that he should not be permitted to speak any thing which was not put into his mouth by God himself;) onward he goes, and addresses himself to his impious work with activity and perseverance. In all his renewed endeavours to curse Israel, he found himself constrained to bless them, insomuch that Balak, furiously enraged against him, dismissed him without any of the riches or honours which he had so eagerly sought after. *Now*, it might be hoped, that Balaam at last should see his error, and humble himself for his iniquity. But, instead of this, he devised a plan whereby that people, who could not be subdued by arms, might be beguiled into sin, and thereby subjected to the displeasure of their Almighty Protector. He advised Balak to make use of the Midianitish women, first to allure them to fornication, and then to draw them to idolatry; and by this means to destroy the *souls* of those, whom he could not otherwise injure[d]. Now compare this with all his professions of reverence for God, of

[c] ver. 22—34. with 2 Pet. ii. 16.
[d] Compare Numb. xxxi. 16. with Rev. ii. 14.

regard for holiness, and of a desire after everlasting happiness; and what an astonishing inconsistency will appear!

But, in truth, though his *circumstances* were peculiar, his *state* is common. Many, many are the people, who, amidst high professions of regard for religion, are as much actuated by love of wealth and honour as ever Balaam was; and, if they can only obtain their own *ends*, are as little scrupulous as he about the *means*. Such are they who resemble the ancient Pharisees, on the one hand; and such also are the descendants of Judas and of Demas, on the other hand. Such characters abounded even in the apostolic age[e]: and we must not wonder, if they be to be found also in the present day[f].]

In the course of this history, whilst we mark the inconsistency of Balaam, we cannot but notice also,

II. The consequences resulting from it—

Let us attend to those which resulted,

1. To his employers—

[Balak had raised his expectations high, and had hoped to derive great advantage from the aid of Balaam: "I know that he whom thou blessest, is blessed; and he whom thou cursest, is cursed." But, after all his expense and trouble, he found that he had trusted to a broken reed; and was constrained to dismiss with indignation the man, whom he had so anxiously endeavoured to interest in his favour.

What a picture does this afford us of the disappointment too often generated in the minds of men by hypocritical professors! One perhaps, having heard of the religious principles of such or such a servant, promises himself the highest satisfaction in connexion with him: but finds him, after all, conceited, idle, deceitful, disobedient. Another deals with such or such a tradesman, in expectation that he shall find in him the integrity suited to his religious professions: but soon learns, that others, who know nothing of religion, are more honourable, and more to be depended on, than he. Another contracts a matrimonial alliance, from the presumption, that the person's sentiments will have a suitable influence on his conduct: but learns afterwards, by bitter experience, that asperities of temper, and imprudences of conduct, even such as any *moral* person would be ashamed of, are too often cloked under a garb of religion, and gratified, to the utter subversion of domestic happiness. Need we say, what a stab such conduct gives to religion, or what a stumbling-block it lays in the way of the ungodly? Truly, through such persons "the way of truth is evil spoken of," the prejudices of thousands are confirmed, and the name of our God and Saviour is blasphemed.]

[e] See 2 Pet. ii. 14, 15. with Rev. iii. 1. and former part of ver. 9.
[f] Ezek. xxxiii. 31.

2. To Israel—

[Though the enchantments of Balaam were unavailing, his diabolical advice was but too successful: the Israelites, unable to resist the allurements of the Midianitish women, were betrayed into an unlawful commerce with them; and thus fell into the snare which Balak had laid for them, and brought upon themselves the heavy displeasure of their God.

And are not hypocritical professors a snare to many? Do they not, either, by a spirit of disputation, turn weak believers "from the simplicity of the Gospel;" or, by a spirit of licentiousness, (which *they* call liberty,) induce them to violate their own consciences? Multitudes of such professsors there have been, and yet are, in the Christian Church; nor will it ever be known till the day of judgment, how many "weak brethren, for whom Christ died, have perished" through their means[g].]

3. To himself—

[It might have been hoped, that after having been constrained to bless Israel, and thus to lose "the rewards of divination" which he coveted, he would have seen "his error," and repented of it. But *this* is very rarely the lot of those, who proceed for any time in a wilful opposition to the convictions of their own minds: they generally become "seared in their consciences," and hardened in their sins. Thus it was with Balaam. Though foiled for the present in his hopes of gain, he would not relinquish his pursuit of it, but still continued among the Midianites, and soon afterwards was involved in their destruction[h].

What a lesson does this teach us! What a prospect does it afford to all who yield themselves to the dominion of an unhallowed appetite! How vain his wish to have "his end like that of the righteous," when he would not resemble them in his life! And truly, if we follow his steps, we shall, like him, perish miserably at last among the enemies of God.]

LEARN then from this history,

1. The danger of indulging any besetting sin—

[The sin of Balaam was covetousness: and we see how it hurried him from one iniquity to another, till it brought him finally to destruction, both of body and soul. Nor is this an uncommon case. There is scarcely any principle more common, or more destructive, than a desire after wealth and preferment. "The love of money," says the Apostle, "is the root of all evil: and many, by coveting after it, have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows[i]." The facility with which men deceive themselves in relation to this principle,

[g] 1 Cor. viii. 9—12. [h] Numb. xxxi. 8. Josh. xiii. 22.
[i] 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

renders it peculiarly dangerous. It scarcely ever appears in any other light than as a venial, at least, if not a commendable, quality. It is likely that Balaam himself did not see the extent of his own iniquity: he probably conceived himself to be solicitous only to know and do the will of God. But an inspired Apostle says of him, that "he loved the wages of unrighteousness," and "ran *greedily* after error for reward." Beware then, Brethren, lest, whilst ye think yourselves only prudent and discreet, God himself should "choose your delusions," "give you up to a reprobate mind," impute the same as sin unto you, and assign you your doom amongst his enemies. Whatever excites in you even a wish to violate the commands of God, will, if not restrained and mortified, assuredly "drown you in destruction and perdition."]

2. The necessity of acting conformably with our principles and professions—

[Happy would it have been for Balaam, if he had so done! But of what use was his knowledge of God, whom he did not fear; or his views of Christ, whom he did not love? Of what benefit was his knowledge of men's duty, when he would not practise it; or his persuasion of a future judgment, for which he made no exertions to prepare? These things served only to enhance his guilt, and to aggravate his condemnation. Thus will it be with us: "it were better never to have known any thing of the way of righteousness, than to" oppose it, or "depart from it." "The servant that knew his Lord's will and did it not, shall be beaten with more stripes, than the servant who sinned through ignorance." I would earnestly entreat you therefore, Brethren, to walk according to the light which you possess. Do not, like Balaam, "imprison the truth in unrighteousness:" do not "profess that you know God, and at the same time in your works deny him:" but rather be yourselves examples unto others, that they may in you behold the sanctifying efficacy of your faith, and the excellency of that religion you profess.]

## CLXXI.

### BALAAM OBSTRUCTED BY THE ANGEL.

Numb. xxii. 31. *Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the Angel of the Lord standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.*

THE ministry of angels is frequently asserted both in the Old and New Testament: but, because it is not *seen*, it is scarcely believed amongst us. Never-

theless, there is not any doctrine more fully established than this; nor scarcely any more clearly exemplified. We need only look to the passage before us; and there we see an angel deputed to intercept Balaam in his way to Midian, and to stop him in his career of wickedness. Whether the angel were the Son of God himself, "the Angel of the Covenant," with whom Jacob afterwards wrestled[a], we will not absolutely determine: but the context seems to countenance the idea that it was[b]. At all events he had the appearance of an angel, and acted in the capacity of a messenger from heaven. For a considerable time Balaam did not see him; though the beast on which he rode, both saw, and endeavoured to avoid him. The whole story is so singular, that some have represented it as a vision. But, whilst that mode of accounting for the circumstances renders them not at all less miraculous than the more obvious interpretation, (for a divine agency would be as necessary in that case, as in the other,) it directly opposes the assertions of the historian, and the testimony of an inspired Apostle[c]. We can have no doubt but that the facts happened as they are related: and, that we may present them before you in a more easy manner, we will call your attention to some observations founded upon them.

I. God often mercifully interposes to obstruct sinners in their ways—

[Balaam, though he professed to be acting by the divine appointment, was in reality going in opposition to the will of God. The permission which had been granted him *conditionally*, he had construed as *unconditional*; and when God had declared that Israel should be *blessed*, Balaam was going with a desire and purpose to *curse* them. God, to awaken him to a sense of his wickedness, sent an angel to stop him in his way, and to make known to him the evil of his conduct.

It is thus that God often interposes to arrest the progress of sinners, and prevent the commission of iniquity. We say not, that he often proceeds *precisely in this way*: he has a great variety of ways in which he carries this gracious purpose into

[a] Hos. xii. 3—5.

[b] See ver. 32, 35. "perverse before *me*"—"the word that *I* shall speak."

[c] 2 Pet. ii. 16.

execution. Elihu, in his address to Job, directly affirms, that God *does* interpose, and in a variety of ways too, for this gracious end[d]: and the Scriptures universally attest the truth of his remark. Sometimes God endeavours to divert men from their purpose by a dream, (as Pilate, by a dream of his wife[e];) sometimes by a vision, (as Saul, in his way to Damascus[f];) sometimes by a judgment, (as Jeroboam, when he stretched out his hand against the man of God[g];) sometimes by a human monitor, (as David, by Abigail[h];) and sometimes by an unforeseen occurrence, (as Saul, when having encompassed David with his army, was called away from him by a sudden invasion of the Philistines[i].) We cannot enumerate, nor indeed conceive, the infinite variety of methods by which God withstands sinners; but all of us, on reflection, must acknowledge both the reality and frequency of his interpositions.

How often has it happened that the thief, the robber, the housebreaker, and the murderer, have been deterred from their purpose by the approach of some unexpected person, or by some suggestion of their own minds! How often have persons under a strong temptation to gratify their lusts, been kept from the actual commission of fornication or adultery by some little occurrence, some noise, some apprehension, some qualm of conscience, which God, in mercy to their souls, has sent to interrupt them! How many unhappy females have been kept from destroying their infant children, either before or after their birth, by some considerations widely different from the fear of sin! It is a well-known fact, that many people, but for such restraints as these, would have even destroyed their own lives: and perhaps, of the many who actually do commit suicide, there is scarcely one, who has not been repeatedly diverted from his purpose, before he could find it in his heart to carry it into execution. So common are the interpositions of God for the prevention of sin, and the rescue of those who would commit it! But,]

II. His most signal interpositions often excite only the wrath of those for whose benefit they are sent—

[Thrice was Balaam interrupted in his course. The first time, his ass turned aside into a field, to avoid the angel; the next time, he ran up against a wall; and the third time, having no other method of avoiding him left, he fell down: and at each time Balaam's anger was kindled; and at last it rose to such a height, that even the strange phenomenon of the ass speaking, as with a human voice, and expostulating with him, was not sufficient to arrest his attention: his only reply was,

[d] Job xxxiii. 14—17. [e] Matt. xxvii. 19. [f] Acts ix. 3, 4.
[g] 1 Kings xiii. 4. [h] 1 Sam. xxv. 32, 33. [i] 1 Sam. xxiii. 28.

that he wished for a sword that he might kill her. Had he known at the time what danger he was exposed to, and what obligations he owed to his beast for that very conduct which so incensed him, he would have seen, that he had reason for unbounded thankfulness, where he thought that he had the greatest reason to complain.

And is it not thus oftentimes with *us?* If nothing had been revealed to us respecting the *deliverance* of Balaam, we should have thought him fully justified in his *anger:* and, because we do not see the particular mercies which God vouchsafes to us, we think ourselves justified in raging against the means and instruments that he employs. There are a thousand things which we call *accidents*, on which the greatest events depend. Evils might have come to us, or blessings might have been lost, if some circumstance, which at the time we deemed most unfortunate, had not taken place: nor can any but God himself conceive the extent to which we are indebted to him for things, which at the time excited our grief and indignation.

On this subject, I must leave every one to consult his own experience. But there is one view of it which will come home to the hearts of all. How often, when God has sent a guardian angel, a friend or minister, to instruct and warn us, have his reproofs kindled resentment, rather than gratitude, in our minds! and how many of us now see reason to be thankful for warnings which once excited our displeasure, whilst others have been eternally ruined by continuing to disregard them! Think only of the ministry of Christ and his Apostles, and of the different states of those who rejected or received their testimony, and this part of our subject will need no further comment. Moreover,]

III. Those interpositions which are acknowledged to have been sent in mercy, produce, for the most part, a very transient effect—

[Balaam, when his eyes were opened, and he was informed that he had narrowly escaped death, acknowledged his sin, and professed a readiness to return. But it is observable, that his very confession touches only on the *supposed* guilt of attempting to proceed in opposition to the angel, and not on the *real* guilt of going with a disposition and purpose directly opposed to the known will of God. So far from being humbled for this offence, he was glad at any rate to gain a renewed permission to prosecute his vile designs. Nor did he afterwards reflect, or repent him of his evil ways; but persisted in them, till vengeance overtook him, and he perished amongst the enemies of God.

Thus have we at times been made sensible of our danger. Some great calamity has overtaken us, or disease has brought us to the gates of death. *Then* we have acknowledged our

sins, and professed a willingness to forsake them. But no sooner have the impediments been removed, than "our goodness has proved as the morning dew; and as the early cloud it has passed away." Thus it was with Pharaoh, when God, by many successive judgments, strove to overcome his obstinacy: and thus it was with Saul, when David repeatedly spared his life. The judgments and mercies of God affected both of them for a moment, so that they confessed their sins: but the effect was transient, and they perished under an accumulated weight of guilt. O that it may not be so with us! O that we may not any longer resemble the rebellious Israelites[k]; lest, like them, we exhaust the patience of our God, and provoke him to "swear in his wrath that we shall never enter into his rest!"]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are bent on their evil ways—

[Covetousness is a common, and destructive sin: and many are guilty of it, whilst they seem unconscious of any great evil. They are decidedly guilty of it, who prefer the prosecution of their interests to the will of God and the welfare of his people. Let such offenders know then, that God and his Angel stand before them with a fiery sword; and that, for ought they know, the very next step they take may transmit them to the presence of an angry God. Methinks the brute creation that obey *their* will, would, if their mouths were opened, rebuke their disobedience, more pointedly than ever Balaam's ass rebuked him[l]. See, Brethren, how Solomon describes your state[m]! see how he warns you of your end[n]! O beg of God, that he would never give you his permission to proceed, but contend with you effectually, till he has gained his point! If once "he give you up," and say, "Let him alone[o]," it were better for you that you had never been born.]

2. Those who desire to return from them—

[Whatever have been the means of stopping your career, be thankful for it: falls or bruises, such as Balaam had, are mercies when sent for such an end. Bear in mind what your conduct has been[p], and be humbled on account of it in dust and ashes. Bear in mind too that you will assuredly "return, like the dog to his vomit," if Almighty God do not keep you by his grace. But he has promised to his people to "hedge up their way with thorns, and to build a wall against them, that they may not find their former ways[q]:" entreat him earnestly to do this for you; and to "keep you by his own power through faith unto salvation."]

[k] Ps. lxxviii. 34—37. [l] Isai. i. 2, 3. Jer. viii. 5—7. [m] Eccl. ix. 3.
[n] Prov. xxix. 1. [o] Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. Hos. iv. 17.
[p] Isai. lvii. 17. [q] Hos. ii. 6, 7.

## CLXXII.

### BALAAM'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL.

Numb. xxiii. 7—10. *And he took up his parable, and said, Balak, the king of Moab, hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the East, saying, Come, curse me Jacob; and come, defy Israel. How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous; and let my last end be like his!*

IT is scarcely to be conceived to what a degree superstition will blind the eyes of men. There is nothing so absurd or incredible, which a person under the influence of it is not ready to believe. Who would imagine that persons could be brought to believe the infallibility of the Pope, and the power of the Popish priests to forgive sin? Who would suppose that any person could be brought to believe, that a priest is able to convert bread and wine into the body and soul, yea, and into the Godhead also, of Christ; and that every individual who partakes of that bread and wine, eats and drinks the whole body, the whole soul, and the whole Godhead of Christ? Yet these things are credited by millions of persons, as firmly as they believe that there is a God.

Were it not that we have such evidence of the power of superstition in later ages, we should scarcely conceive, that any Being endowed with reason would act like Balak, when he sent for Balaam to curse Israel. How could he entertain such a foolish thought, as that Balaam should be able to inflict a curse upon the whole Israelitish nation, so as to ensure the conquest of them to the king of Moab? Yet this superstition obtained, not only there, and at that time, but fifteen hundred years afterwards at Rome also, where there was an officer expressly appointed to imprecate curses on their enemies.

How little it was in the power of Balaam to effect, we see in every renewed attempt that he made. So far from being able to *inflict* a curse on Israel, he was not able even to *denounce* one: for God overruled and constrained him to *bless* the people whom he desired to *curse*.

Having offered seven bullocks and seven rams on as many altars, he came to Balak, who was anxiously expecting the accomplishment of his wishes. But, behold, the man on whose power he relied to curse Israel, was constrained explicitly to declare,

I. Their security—

Balaam acknowledges that it was *not in his power* to curse them: and declares that, instead of being vanquished by Balak, they should prevail against every enemy, and *be a peculiar people* to the end of time.

This has ever since been verified in relation to those who are *Israelites after the flesh*—

[That nation did prevail over their enemies; did get possession of Canaan; did maintain it against all their enemies, till, for their iniquities, God sent them into captivity in Babylon. Yet even there did they retain their peculiarities: yea, even at this day, though dispersed through every country under heaven, they are as much a peculiar people as ever. Other nations, when vanquished and dispersed, have become incorporated with their victors, and been assimilated to the people amongst whom they have dwelt: but the Jews in every country are still a distinct people: and are living witnesses of the truth of this prophecy.]

It is no less verified in relation to *the spiritual Israel*—

[Every blessing promised to Abraham and his *natural* seed was, *in a spiritual sense*, made also to his spiritual seed. The Gospel itself, with all the blessings of salvation, was contained in that promise, "In thy seed shall all nations be blessed[a]." It is evident, moreover, that Balaam himself was instructed of God to prophesy of persons under the gospel dispensation, even of those who should be the subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ[b]. Now *they* are indeed a peculiar people[c]:" they "dwell alone:" "though *in* the world, they are not *of* the world, even as Christ himself was not of the world[d]:" they

[a] Gal. iii. 8. [b] Numb. xxiv. 17—19.
[c] Exod. xix. 5, 6. 1 Pet. ii. 9. [d] John xvii. 14, 16.

"are not conformed to it;" "they come out from it and are separate;" they can "have no more communion with it, than light can have with darkness, or Christ with Belial." They dwell in the midst of enemies, amongst whom they are "men wondered at." Wherever they are, they are, and ever have been, in a greater or less degree, objects of hatred and persecution. Every possible method has been used to extirpate them; but no enemy has ever been able to prevail against them. They are still, and ever shall be, monuments of God's power, and objects of his love.]

II. Their increase—

The Israelites, as a nation, became very numerous—

[At the time that Balaam saw them, they probably amounted to two millions: but after their settlement in Canaan they multiplied exceedingly, so as to fulfil the promise made to Abraham[e], and to justify the declaration in the text.]

But the true Israel shall *indeed* be "as the dust of the earth"—

[In the first ages of Christianity they were spread over the whole Roman empire: and though we acknowledge that hitherto they have not been numerous, *when compared with their enemies*, yet we are assured, that they shall in due time cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and for the space of a thousand years fill the whole earth. And, if we consider how they will multiply when wars shall cease, when the diseases arising from men's folly and wickedness shall be removed, and "the man dying at an hundred years old shall be considered but a child" brought to an untimely end[f]; we may well imagine, that their numbers shall far exceed that of all who have perished in their sins. We are sure at all events, that, in the last day, they shall be "a multitude, which no man can number, out of every nation, and kindred, and people, and tongue;" and that they shall join together in everlasting hallelujahs, "saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb[g]!" O blessed period! May "God hasten it, in His time!"]

III. Their happiness—

Balaam proclaims them happy also in their eternal state—

[Here he *must* refer to those who were the *true* Israelites; since an ungodly Jew can no more be saved, than an ungodly heathen. And it is worthy of notice, how strongly he asserts

[e] Gen. xxviii. 14. [f] Isai. lxv. 20. [g] Rev. vii. 10.

the happiness of the godly in a future world. He looked forward to their future state: he saw them distinguished from the ungodly; he saw, that, however they might be involved in the calamities of the wicked *here*, they would be translated by death to a state of endless felicity: hence he envied them, and desired to have "his last end like theirs."]

And truly in this view they are objects of envy to the whole world—

[The wish that Balaam expressed is the wish of every man, even of the most abandoned. There is no one living under the light of the Gospel, but feels an inward persuasion that God will put a difference between the righteous and the wicked. However much he may hate the *persons* of the godly, he envies their *state;* and has at some time the thought arising in his mind, 'If I were now to die, I should be glad to be found in your state.' And well may this be the case, seeing that God has prepared for them "such good things as pass man's understanding"———Were it not for their future prospects, they would be rather in a pitiable condition, especially in seasons of bitter persecution[h]: but, with such hopes before them, they can be in no condition whatever, wherein they are not greatly to be envied———]

To IMPROVE this subject, we shall add a word,

1. Of warning—

[Balaam by all his efforts could not prevail on God to reverse his word respecting Israel: on the contrary, the word which he delivered by God's command has been fulfilled to them in all ages. And shall not what God hath spoken both here and elsewhere, respecting the *end* of the righteous and the wicked, be fulfilled? Shall any man *die the death* of the righteous, if he will not *live his life;* or shall he attain his *end* without walking in his *way?* If God has declared that he *will* "put a difference between those who serve him, and those who serve him not," who shall prevail upon him to change his mind? or "who shall harden himself against HIM, and prosper?" O, think of this, beloved, and buoy not up yourselves with unfounded expectations: for "God is not a man that he should lie, or the son of man that he should repent."]

2. Of consolation—

[Little did Israel know what plots were formed against them: but God knew, and counteracted them all. Thus it is with God's Israel now. Both men and devils are confederate against them: Satan especially, "like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking, if possible, to devour them:" but God overrules

[h] 1 Cor. xv. 19. ἐλεεινότεροι.

all their devices for good, and gives us a blessing where they would have sent a curse. He has promised, that "no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper:" and he will fulfil it even to the end: he will "keep us by his own power through faith unto everlasting salvation." Let us then not say, A confederacy, a confederacy; but let us "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts, and make *him* our fear, and *him* our dread." He will be "a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in the midst of us:" he will keep us even as the apple of his eye: nor "shall any one who trusts in him, ever be ashamed or confounded world without end." As Balaam could not prevail against Israel of old, so "not all the gates of hell shall prevail against us." Only put your trust in God, and you may, in the language of the Apostle, defy the whole universe to "separate you from the love of God[1]."]

[1] Rom. viii. 35—39.

## CLXXIII.

### BALAAM'S SECOND ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL.

Numb. xxiii. 18—23. *And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless; and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. God brought them out of Egypt: he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought?*

THE distinct answers which God gave to Balaam are surely deserving of distinct consideration. The general scope of them indeed is the same; namely, that Israel should be blessed: but the terms in which that declaration was made, are diversified, and contain in them a great variety of important matter. We are astonished indeed that God would condescend to notice Balaam a second time, more especially as he had the impiety to approach him with divinations and enchantments[a]. But, for the sake of his Church and

[a] Numb. xxiv. 1.

people, the Lord himself met Balaam again, and constrained him, in his reply to Balak, to declare,

I. The immutability of God—

Balaam had endeavoured to turn God from his purpose; and perhaps, from having, as he conceived, prevailed upon him to reverse his word before, he hoped to succeed in like manner again. But he was compelled to confess to Balak *the inefficacy of his attempts to change the mind of God*—

[Balak had supposed Balaam to be capable of effecting great things; and had imputed his former answer to a want of inclination, rather than of power, to comply with his wishes. But Balaam here distinctly confesses, that it was not in his power to "reverse," or alter, what God had spoken: and that, consequently, it was in vain to make any renewed attempts.

Man, from a variety of causes, might be led to change his mind: he might gain a further insight into a matter than he had possessed before; or he might be biassed by some intervening interests; or he might find himself incapable of executing his projects for want of power: but no such occasions of change can exist in God: "He is not a man that he should lie;" there is in him "no variableness, neither shadow of turning:" "He *cannot* lie:" "it is *impossible* that he should[b]:" he is as unchangeable in his *purposes*, as he is in his *perfections*: "He is of one mind; and who can turn him?" So self-evident was this truth, that Balaam appealed even to the conscience of Balak himself respecting it: "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?"

This view of the Deity was a sufficient answer to Balak: it was a pledge to him, that the promises originally made to Abraham should be fulfilled to his descendants. And it is an answer too to all the unbelieving fears which occasionally arise in our minds. "God's gifts and callings are without repentance[c]." "He will not forsake his people, because it hath pleased him to make them his people[d]:" and it is owing solely to the unchangeableness of his mercies, that any one of his people escapes destruction: "He changeth not; and therefore the sons of Jacob are not consumed[e]."]

The immutability of God being established, Balaam proceeded to recite,

II. The kindness he (God) had already shewn to his people—

[b] Tit. i. 2. Heb. vi. 18.
[c] Rom. xi. 29.
[d] 1 Sam. xii. 22.
[e] Mal. iii. 6.

This was such as gave Balak but little hope of ever succeeding against them—

[God had forgiven their sins, so that nothing which they had done amiss should ever provoke him to destroy them. Doubtless there was in them much "iniquity," and much "perverseness:" but they had not renounced their allegiance to him or their affiance in him; and therefore he would not give them up to their enemies. He had "cast all their sins behind his back into the depths of the sea," and he viewed them only with an eye of love and mercy. He considered them still as *his* peculiar *people:* and he dwelt in the midst of them as *their* God. Moreover, such manifestations did he afford them of his love and favour, that they could not but rejoice in their security, and triumph in him, with shouts and acclamations, as their Almighty Protector.]

It shews us also what God does for his people at this time—

[The best of his people are but imperfect creatures: "in many things we all offend." But, if we be truly his, "he does not behold iniquity or perverseness in us." We are not by this to understand, that sin, if committed by the Lord's people, is not sinful; or that it is not most hateful in his eyes: but we are to understand that he is "not extreme to mark what we do amiss;" that, on the contrary, he views us as "perfect in Christ Jesus," by whom we are "presented faultless before him," and through whose blood and righteousness we are made "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, yea holy, and without blemish[f]."

Regarding us thus as objects of his favour, he delights to dwell amongst us, to abide with us, to manifest himself to us, and to "fill us with joy and peace in believing;" so that he enables us to say with the Apostle, "Thanks be to God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ Jesus!" Truly, "the children of Zion are made joyful in their King," yea, they "ever shout for joy, because he defendeth them:" "they sing unto him for the excellent things which he hath done; they cry out and shout, because great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of them[g]."]

From the mention of what God hath done for his people, Balaam went on to declare,

III. The kindness he has yet in reserve for them—

The time was soon to come when all the surrounding nations should be astonished at it—

[f] Eph. v. 27. Jude, ver. 24. [g] Ps. cxxvi. 1, 2. and Isai. xii. 5, 6.

[God had already "brought them out of Egypt, and given them, as it were, the strength of an unicorn." He had suffered no machinations of men or devils to prevail against them. He had fulfilled all his promises to them hitherto; and the time was now nearly arrived, when he would accomplish them in their full extent. However formidable the opposition to them might be, "they should rise up like a lion to his prey, which lies not down till he has drunk the blood of the slain." In a word, such should be his marvellous interpositions in their favour, that all who beheld them should exclaim, "What hath God wrought!"]

But it was a mere shadow of the kindness he has laid up for us—

[It is not from an Egyptian tyrant that we are delivered, but from sin and Satan, death and hell. Nor are we endued with strength against an earthly enemy, but against all the powers of darkness; insomuch that "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly." Not only shall "the gates of hell never prevail against his Church" at large, but not against even the weakest of his people: both Christ and his Father are pledged, that "however weak the believer may be, none shall ever be able to pluck him out of their hands[h]." The least of the flock have no more cause to fear than the greatest; for "it is the Father's good pleasure to give, to the one as well as to the other, the possession of his kingdom[i]." The weakest shall be "strong in the Lord," yea, strong as a lion: he shall be "able to do all things" that are conducive to his welfare; and shall be "more than conqueror through Him that loved him." O what "a wonder is he unto many," even at this time! and what a wonder will he be, both to himself and others, in the eternal world! When the whole Israel of God shall be in possession of the heavenly land, how will each say, on a review of his own mercies in particular, as well as those vouchsafed to the whole collective body, "What hath God wrought!" Truly, they will all be lost in wonder, love, and praise.]

Let none dismiss this subject from their minds without

REFLECTING,

1. How great are their obligations to God!

[Here, as in a glass, we may see them very distinctly: and we read this history to little purpose, if we see not in it transactions of the present day. To recapitulate the mercies of God towards us, or to point out their correspondence with those that were vouchsafed to Israel, is needless. The slight mention we have already made of them is sufficient.

[h] John x. 28, 29. [i] Luke xii. 32.

But it is of importance to ask, What effect have they produced upon our minds? Have we not again and again been constrained to say, "What hath God wrought!" "What manner of love is this wherewith the Father hath loved us!" Be assured, that the man who is not frequently (I might almost say, habitually,) impressed with this thought, knows nothing of God, nor has he any part or lot in the gospel salvation ———]

2. How strenuous should be their exertions to walk worthy of them!

[It is thought by some, that views of God's sovereign grace and unchanging love will lead men to carelessness and presumption. It behoves us all to shew, that there is no foundation for this calumny; and that the stupendous love of Christ will rather constrain us to obedience. Let us remember, that, if the promises of God are sure, so also are the threatenings: and that we can no more reverse these, than Satan can reverse the others, if we be found in a state against which God has threatened his displeasure.

How painful is the thought, that, notwithstanding all the warnings which God has given them, many will yet perish in their sins! Methinks, if God's mercy will excite wonder among those that are saved, so will sin excite wonder among them that perish. With what force will that reflection strike us in the day of judgment, "What hath SIN wrought!" O think upon it now: and let us not only flee from it, but endeavour so to "walk, that God in all things may be glorified through Christ Jesus!"]

## CLXXIV.

### GOD WILL FULFIL HIS WORD.

Numb. xxiii. 19. *God is not a man, that he should lie.*

THERE is scarcely any thing that more strongly manifests the depravity of our nature, than that propensity to lying which we perceive in children, as soon as they begin to speak[a]. Even when men are grown to the full exercise of their reason, they too often deviate from truth, sometimes through forgetfulness, sometimes from a change of sentiment or inclination, and sometimes from an inability to perform their word. Hence it is characteristic of man to lie: and we are all so sensible of this, that in matters of great importance we require of men an oath to confirm

[a] Ps. lviii. 3.

their word, and enter into written covenants with them, which we take care to have properly attested[b].

Now we are apt to "think that God is even such an one as ourselves:" and that he also may be prevailed upon to "alter the word that is gone out of his lips." Balak evidently entertained this idea of him; and laboured by many repeated sacrifices to divert him from his purpose. But Balaam was inspired to declare the vanity of such an hope, and to assert in a most humiliating comparison the unchangeableness of Jehovah.

To unfold the full meaning of his words, we observe,

I. Some men think that God will lie—

God has told us with strong and repeated asseverations, that "we must be born again[c]"——— But this is totally disbelieved by,

1. The profane—

[They persuade themselves, that such strictness in religion as is implied in the new birth, is not necessary; and that they shall go to heaven in their own way———]

2. The self-righteous—

[These consider regeneration as a dream of weak enthusiasts; and are satisfied with "the form of godliness without" ever experiencing "the power of it"———]

3. The hypocritical professors of religion—

[These, having changed their creed together with their outward conduct, fancy themselves Christians, notwithstanding their faith neither "overcomes the world," nor "works by love," nor "purifies their hearts"———

That all these persons think God will lie, is evident beyond a doubt: for if they really believed that "old things must pass away, and all things become new[d]," before they can enter into the kingdom of heaven, they would feel concerned to know whether any such change had taken place in them; nor would they ever be satisfied till they had a scriptural evidence that they were indeed "new creatures in Christ Jesus." But as this is in no respect the case with them, it is manifest that they "do not believe the record of God," and consequently, however harsh the expression may seem, "they make God a liar[e]."]

[b] Heb. vi. 16. Gal. iii. 15.
[c] John iii. 3. See the full import of this in Discourse on that text.
[d] 2 Cor. v. 17. [e] 1 John v. 10.

While some do not hesitate to entertain these dishonourable thoughts of God,

II. Others fear he may lie—

This is common with persons,

1. Under conviction of sin—

[When men are deeply convinced of sin, they find it exceeding difficult to rest simply on the promises of the Gospel. God promises to cast out none who come to him by Christ Jesus; to wash them from sins of deepest dye; and to bestow on them all the blessings of salvation freely "without money and without price[f]." Now this appears too good to be true: they cannot conceive how God should "justify the ungodly[g]," and therefore they seek to become godly first, in order that they may be justified: and if they cannot bring some price in their hands, they keep back, and give themselves over to desponding fears ———]

2. Under temptation or desertion—

[God has declared that "he will not suffer his people to be tempted above what they are able to bear[h]." But when they come into temptation, they are apt to say, as David, "I shall one day perish by the hands of Saul[i]." They see no way for their escape; and therefore they fear that the very next wave will overwhelm them utterly ———

If God at these seasons hide his face from them, they conclude "there is no hope;" they think "his mercy clean gone for ever, and his loving-kindness come utterly to an end for evermore[k]," notwithstanding God has so frequently and so expressly declared, that he will never leave them nor forsake them[l] ———

Now these persons do not, like the ungodly, deliberately *think* that God *will* lie; but they have many misgiving *fears* lest he *should*: and that they do so is obvious; for, if they did not, they would take God at his word, and "stay themselves on him when they are in darkness, and have no light[m]."]

Thus generally is the veracity of him who is truth itself, either questioned or denied:

III. But God neither will nor can lie—

It is humiliating beyond expression that ministers should be forced to vindicate the veracity of God. But as he himself has seen fit to do so in the sacred

[f] John vi. 37. Isai. i. 18. and lv. 1. [g] Rom. iv. 5.
[h] 1 Cor. x. 13. [i] 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. [k] Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.
[l] Heb. xiii. 5. [m] Isai. l. 10.

oracles, and as the unbelief of men is so inveterate, we submit to the necessity, and proceed to shew that,

1. He will not lie—

[First, let us hear *the testimonies of those who have tried him.* Had ever any one more opportunities of proving his fidelity than Moses, Joshua, and Samuel? Yet they all attest in the most solemn manner that he neither had deceived them in any thing, nor ever would[n] — — —

Next, let us attend to *God's own assertions and appeals*[o] — — — Would he ever venture to speak thus strongly on his own behalf, if his creatures could make good their accusations against him?

Lastly, let us look to *matter of fact.* He threatened to punish the angels if they should prove disobedient: he denounced a curse on Adam if he should eat of the forbidden tree: he threatened to destroy the whole world with a deluge; and to overwhelm Sodom and Gomorrha with fire and brimstone; and to scatter his once chosen people over the face of the whole earth. See now whether he has forborne to execute any of these threatenings. He also promised to send his only dear Son to die for sinners; and to make him great among the Gentiles, while his own nation should almost universally reject him. Have either of these promises been forgotten? Or, if *such* promises, and *such* threatenings have received their accomplishment, is there any reason to doubt respecting any other that are yet unfulfilled? Are not his past actions so many types and pledges of what he will hereafter perform[p]?]

2. He cannot lie—

[Truth is as essential to the divine nature as goodness, wisdom, power, or any other attribute; so that he can as easily cease to be good, or wise, or powerful, as he can suffer "one jot or tittle of his word to fail." If for one moment he could divest himself of truth, he would cease to be deserving of all confidence or affection. Let it only be said of any *man*, "He is great, and wise, and generous, but no dependence can be placed on his word," would he not on the whole be deemed a contemptible character? How then would Jehovah be degraded, if any such infirmity could be laid to his charge?

It should seem that St. Paul was peculiarly solicitous to guard us against entertaining the smallest possible doubt of the divine veracity; for he abounds in expressions declarative of this perfection. "God," says he, "cannot lie[q];" and again,

[n] Deut. xxxii. 4. Josh. xxiii. 14. 1 Sam. xv. 29.
[o] Isai. v. 4. and xlix. 19.
[p] 2 Pet. ii. 4—9. Jude, ver. 7. Πρόκεινται δεῖγμα. [q] Tit. i. 2.

"he cannot deny himself[r];" and again in still stronger terms, "It is impossible for God to lie[s]." Nor let it be thought that this detracts from God's power: for to be able to lie, would be a weakness rather than a perfection: and as it is man's disgrace that he is prone to violate his word, so it is God's honour that he neither will nor can lie.]

INFER,

1. How vain are the expectations of unconverted men!

[Men, whatever may be their state, persuade themselves that they shall be happy when they die. But how delusive must be that hope, which is built upon the expectation that God will prove himself a liar! Who are we, that God should, (if we may so speak) undeify himself for us? And what security should we have if he were even to admit us into heaven in direct opposition to his own word? Might he not change his word again, and cast us into hell at last? Surely heaven would be no heaven, if it were held on so precarious a tenure. Let us then lay aside all such delusive hopes. Let us learn to tremble at God's word; and seek to attain that entire change both of heart and life, to which the promises of salvation are annexed.]

2. How groundless are the fears of the converted!

[There is a holy fear or jealousy that is highly desirable for every one, however eminent, however established. But there is a tormenting slavish fear that arises from unbelief, and which greatly retards our progress in the divine life. Now we ask, Does this fear arise from an apprehension of our own unfaithfulness, or of God's? If it be God's faithfulness that we doubt, let us know that "his gifts and callings are *without repentance*[t]," and that "where he hath begun a good work, he will perfect it unto the day of Christ[u]." If, on the other hand, we suspect our own faithfulness, let us recollect on whom our faithfulness depends: if it depend wholly on ourselves, who amongst us will be saved[x]? Thanks be to God, he who has been the author of our faith, has engaged to be the finisher of it[y]; and has promised, not only that he will not depart from us, but that he will put his fear in our hearts, so that we shall not depart from him[z]. Let us then "set to our seal that God is true[a]." Let us commit ourselves to him, knowing in whom we have believed[b], and assured that, while we stand on the foundation of his word, we are immovably secure[c].]

[r] 2 Tim. ii. 13. [s] Heb. vi. 18.
[t] Compare Rom. xi. 29. with the words following the text.
[u] Phil. i. 6. [x] 2 Cor. iii. 5. Zech. iv. 6.
[y] Heb. xii. 2. Zech. iv. 9. [z] Jer. xxxii. 39, 40.
[a] John iii. 33. [b] 2 Tim. i. 12. [c] 2 Tim. ii. 19.

## CLXXV.

### BALAAM'S THIRD ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL.

Numb. xxiv. 5, 9. *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! — — — Blessed is he that blesseth thee; and cursed is he that curseth thee.*

IF there were no other instance than that before us, we could never doubt the influence of God over all his creatures. Balaam had shewn strongly enough his desire to curse Israel; but had been twice constrained to speak the words which God had put into his mouth. On this third occasion, he saw that it was in vain to use enchantments; and therefore he laid them all aside; and gave himself up, without any further resistance, to declare whatever God should say unto him.

His preface is usually represented as a pompous recital of his own peculiar privileges and attainments: but it is rather a relation of the circumstances that occurred whilst he was on his way to Balak. He speaks of himself as "the man whose eyes *were shut,*" (so it *should be* read; and so it *is read* in the margin of our Bibles:) and who "had a vision of the Almighty, *falling,* but having his eyes open:" (the words, "*into a trance,*" are printed in italics, to shew that they are inserted by the translators, and *are not in the original:*) his ass fell, and he fell also; and then his eyes were opened, to see the angel; whom, though his ass had seen, *he* had not till then been enabled to behold. On a view of the orderly manner in which the Israelites were encamped, he expressed his admiration of them; and then, in the concluding words of our text declared the irreversible decree of God respecting them: "Blessed, &c. &c."

We shall consider these words,

I. In reference to the Jewish nation—

To them, in their primary sense, the words must certainly refer. But, when we read such a solemn declaration respecting them, we are naturally led to ask,

1. How can we account for it?

[Was there any peculiar *merit* in them, that had induced Jehovah so wonderfully to signalize them with his favour? No: they were a stiff-necked people from first to last. But God had "chosen them for himself to be a peculiar people:" and had pledged himself to fulfil to them all the promises, which he had made to Abraham respecting them. Whoever therefore should set himself against that people, would be endeavouring to thwart the divine counsels; whilst every one who should promote the prosperity of Zion, would, in fact, advance the designs of God. No wonder therefore that God pronounced a blessing or a curse on all, according as they co-operated with him, or opposed his will.]

2. How was it fulfilled?

[In addition to all that has been stated on the two former occasions, we are here led to contemplate the prosperity of Israel under the images of a verdant valley, a well-watered garden, and fragrant or stately trees: they are further spoken of as marvellously enriched, prolific, powerful. But we may particularly notice the discrimination made between the Gibeonites and all the other nations of Canaan. *These*, because they made a league with Joshua, were spared, protected, and preserved; whilst all the others, without exception, were destroyed[a]. And, many hundred years afterwards, when Saul had broken the covenant with them, and had sought to destroy them, God avenged their cause by a famine during three successive years, and caused the injustice of Saul to be punished in the destruction of almost all his family[b]. When at last the Israelites had provoked God utterly to abandon them, they became weak as others, and were left, as at this day, to experience all the evils, which, as God's instruments, they themselves had inflicted upon other nations.]

The declaration in our text must further be considered,

II. In reference to the spiritual Israel—

If only we reflect, that this declaration was a repetition of the promise made to Abraham and to Jacob, its application to the *spiritual* seed of Abraham will be obvious and undeniable[c]. Let us consider then,

1. What is implied in this declaration—

[It does not relate to *temporal* benefits or evils, but to those which are *spiritual* and *eternal* — — — And it shall assuredly be fulfilled to men in its utmost extent, according as they shall

[a] Josh. ix. 25—27. and x. 1—11. [b] 2 Sam. xxi. 1—9.
[c] Gen. xii. 3. and xxvii. 29.

be found to have loved and aided the true Israelites, or to have hated and opposed them[d] — — — Divine Providence even in this world may be expected to put a difference between the friends and enemies of Zion[e]: but, if none be visible in this world, it shall be made visible enough in the world to come[f].]

2. On what ground we may expect its accomplishment—

[The circumstance of its being uttered by the voice of inspiration, is a pledge of its accomplishment. It may appear strange indeed that God should interest himself to such an extent in behalf of his believing people: but there are two grounds on which we may be well assured that he will do so: the one is, that *he considers our conduct towards his Church, as a criterion of our true character*[g]; and the other is, that *he identifies himself with his Church*, accounting every thing which is done to *them*, as done to *himself*[h]. Realize these thoughts, and all doubt respecting the accomplishment of the declaration will vanish for ever.]

LEARN,

1. The importance of ascertaining our true character—

[If we truly "love him that begat, we shall also love those who are begotten of him[i]." Let us bring ourselves to this test, and carefully judge ourselves as in the presence of God.]

2. The blessedness of being Israelites indeed—

[If God be so interested about you as to deal with men according to their conduct towards you, what blessings may not you yourselves expect at his hands? — — —]

[d] Isai. liv. 15—17. and lx. 14. and lxv. 13, 14.
[e] Ps. cxxii. 6. and cxxix. 5—8. [f] 2 Thess. i. 6, 7.
[g] Luke ii. 34, 35. 1 Pet. ii. 6—8.
[h] Whether *good*, Matt. xxv. 40. or *evil*, Zech. ii. 8. Acts ix. 4, 5.
[i] 1 John v. 1.

## CLXXVI.

### CHRIST THE STAR SPOKEN OF BY BALAAM.

Numb. xxiv. 15—17. *And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: He hath said, who heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, who saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre*

*shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.*

IT has pleased God on various occasions to make known his will to persons of a very unworthy character; and to shew that his ways and thoughts are not regulated by the vain maxims of human wisdom. He proclaimed to Ahaz the conception of our Emmanuel in the womb of a virgin. To Nebuchadnezzar he revealed the successive destruction of the four great monarchies, and the erection of the Messiah's kingdom on the ruins of them all. Thus, in the passage before us, we are informed, that he declared to Balaam not only his purposes respecting Israel and the nations that surrounded them, but the advent of that glorious person, who, as a star should enlighten, and as a prince should govern, the whole world.

Let us consider,

I. The prophecy—

*The introduction to this prophecy* is not unworthy of our notice—

[It seems very strongly to characterize the person who delivered it. When prophecies have been delivered by pious men, they have either been introduced with a plain declaration, "Thus saith the Lord;" or the prefatory observations have been calculated to exalt and glorify God. But Balaam's prediction is ushered in with a pompous exhibition of his own attainments, intended, as it should seem, to wrest from Balak that respect and honour, which he had failed to procure by his preceding prophecies[a].

It shews us too, in a very awful and convincing light, how much knowledge we may possess, while yet we are utterly destitute of converting grace. The most highly favoured of God's servants from the beginning of the world had not delivered a clearer prophecy of Christ than that which was uttered by Balaam on this occasion. Nor is it improbable

[a] There is some little obscurity in the passage, occasioned by the translation. The words "whose eyes are open," in ver. 15. should be, "whose eyes were shut;" and the words "in a trance," which are printed in italics, should not have been inserted. The former refers to his not seeing the angel, when the ass saw him; and the latter to his falling flat on his face when the angel discovered himself to him. See Numb. xxii. 27—31.

that the expectation which obtained throughout the East, that a prince should arise out of Judea and rule the whole world, was occasioned very much by this prophecy. It is remarkable that the Eastern Magi no sooner saw the supernatural star, than they concluded that this Prince was born, and came immediately to Judea to inquire, Where is he that is *born* King of the Jews? Yet where shall we find a baser character than Balaam's? Having considerable knowledge of the true God, he still continued to use enchantments as a *magician*. He was so *covetous* that he "ran greedily after a reward," and preferred "the wages of unrighteousness" to every consideration, either of duty to God or of love to man[b]. His *hypocrisy* was conspicuous from first to last; for in the midst of all his high professions of regard to the will and word of God, he laboured to the utmost to counteract the designs of God, and to reverse his decrees. More *murderous* purposes never were entertained in the heart of man; for it was his most earnest desire to curse all the people of God, and to consign them over to destruction by the sword of their enemies. His last act especially was truly *diabolical:* when he found he could not prevail to destroy their bodies, he taught their enemies how to tempt them and to destroy their souls[c]. After comparing his character with his professions and attainments in divine knowledge, what shall we say? Shall we not tremble for ourselves, lest we should rest in a speculative knowledge of Christ, and fail, after all, of obtaining any saving interest in him? We are elsewhere informed that we may have the gifts of prophecy, of tongues, and of a miraculous faith, and yet be only as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbals[d]. And our Lord assures us that many will in the last day plead the miraculous works that they have performed, but be dismissed with this humiliating answer, Depart from me, I never knew you[e]. Even Judas himself was not, in respect of gifts, behind the very chiefest Apostles. Let us then never value ourselves on any discoveries of divine truth, unless we have suitable affections and a correspondent practice.]

*The prophecy itself* is deserving of particular attention—

[In its primary sense it must be understood in reference to David. The immediate intention of Balaam was, to inform Balak "what the Israelites should do unto his people in the latter days." Accordingly he declares that one, like a star for brightness, should arise from among the Jews at a distant period, to sway the Jewish sceptre, and to destroy the king-

[b] Jude, ver. 11. 2 Pet. ii. 15, 16.
[c] Rev. ii. 14.
[d] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.
[e] Matt. vii. 22, 23.

doms of Edom and Moab. This was fulfilled in David, who subjugated the Moabites, and slew every male in Edom[f].

But there can be no doubt of its ultimately referring to Christ himself. Christ is called in Scripture "the Day-star," "the bright and morning Star;" nor did ever any one arise with splendour comparable to his. He too sat upon the throne of his father David, and exercised unlimited dominion. The children of Edom and Moab may be justly considered as representing the enemies of his Church and people. These he subdues and will finally destroy; not one shall live before him: "he will reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Doubts have arisen whether by "Sheth" we are to understand that son of Adam, whose posterity alone survived the flood; or some person or place of eminence in Moab; (which on the whole is the more probable) but in both senses the prediction was equally fulfilled in Christ, who "has the heathen for his inheritance and the utmost ends of the earth for his possession." HIM then did Balaam see, as Abraham also had seen four hundred years before, but not, alas! with Abraham's joyful hope. Of HIS victorious career he spake, saying, "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh."]

Having ascertained the import of the prophecy, let us consider,

II. The IMPROVEMENT to be made of it—

1. Let us be thankful for its accomplishment—

[We have not to look forward at the distance of fifteen centuries; nor yet to travel, like the Eastern Magi, through trackless deserts, to behold the Lord. We see him "*now*;" we behold him "*nigh*." We have not to go up to heaven, to bring him down, or to go down into the deep, to bring him up. No: he is nigh unto us, even in the word of faith which we have both in our hands and our hearts[g]. Truly he is not only arisen on our benighted world, but, if it be not our own fault, "he is arisen in our very hearts[h]," so that "we behold his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of his Father, full of grace and truth[i]."

We see his "dominion" already established in the world[k]. From the hour in which he sent down his Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost even to the present moment, has his kingdom been extending over the face of the earth: and the hour is fast approaching when "all kings shall fall down before him, and all nations shall serve him[l]," and "all the kingdoms of the

[f] 2 Sam. viii. 2, 14. Ps. lx. 8. 1 Kings xi. 15, 16.
[g] Rom. x. 6—8. [h] 2 Pet. i. 19. [i] John i. 14.
[k] ver. 19. [l] Ps. lxxii. 8—11.

world become his undivided empire." May I not say too that even in the hearts of many here present he has set up his throne? Yes, and I hope that in due season "he will bruise Satan himself under our feet," and "bring every thought into captivity" to his holy will. If we then be not thankful, methinks "the very stones will cry out againt us."]

2. Let us receive the Lord under the very characters by which he is here revealed—

[Let us give up ourselves willingly to his guidance, and not regard any difficulties we may encounter in our way. Truly we may see our way traced out with accuracy in his blessed word, the way which he himself trod when he was upon earth. It is impossible to miss our end, if only we follow his steps.

Let us also surrender up ourselves to him in a way of holy obedience, knowing no will but his, and doing it without reserve. Under him we ourselves also are to fight: and if we "do valiantly[m]" we have nothing to fear: for "through his strength we can do all things[n]." You have seen how Edom and Moab fell before David, and how Christ's "sceptre" has prevailed over the great enemy of our salvation. And so shall "all enemies be put both under his feet," and under ours, till, having overcome like him, we be exalted to his throne for ever and ever.

See Israel at the time of Balaam's prophecy. They were altogether unused to war; yet did they vanquish all the kingdoms of Canaan. And so shall we, though weak as "worms, thresh the mountains" before us[o], and be "more than conquerors through him that loved us." In vain shall any attempt to "curse us:" for "there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel:" and to all eternity shall we, as monuments of our Redeemer's love, be occupied with adoring gratitude, each exclaiming for himself, and all uniting in that overwhelming sentiment, "What hath God wrought[p]!"

[m] ver. 18. [n] Phil. iv. 13. [o] Isai. xli. 14, 15. [p] Numb. xxiii. 23.

## CLXXVII.

### PHINEHAS REWARDED FOR HIS ZEAL.

Numb. xxv. 10—13. *And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, (while he was zealous for my sake among them,) that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace: and he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting*

*priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel.*

SATAN is incessant in his endeavours to destroy the people of God: and, if one device fail, he has recourse to another: nor is he ever at a loss for a succession of expedients, whereby to accomplish his malignant ends. He had laboured hard, in concert with Balaam his willing agent, to bring a curse upon Israel: but he had been foiled in every attempt. What, however, he could not effect by the sword of Moab, he more successfully essayed to do through the influence of their own corruptions, and the fascinations of abandoned women: and, if the zeal of Phinehas had not intervened to arrest the arm of divine vengeance, we know not to what an extent the calamities of Israel might have reached.

In considering what is here recorded concerning Phinehas, we shall notice,

I. The act for which he was rewarded—

A most grievous iniquity was committed in the camp—

[Balaam had advised Balak to ensnare the Israelites by means of the Midianitish women[a]. An intercourse between them had been opened: the Israelites fell into the snare; and were drawn into unlawful connexions with them, and then into idolatry itself. Thus God was incensed against his people; and after having protected them from the imprecations of Balaam, became himself the executioner of heavy judgments upon them. In addition to the plague which he himself inflicted upon the people, he ordered Moses to send forth and slay the chief offenders, and to hang them up in the sight of all the congregation.

Whilst these judgments were executing, and the unoffending part of the congregation were "weeping before the door of the tabernacle," behold, a man of distinction in one of the tribes brought a Midianitish woman to his tent, in the very sight of Moses and of all the congregation. The guilt of such an illicit commerce would under any circumstances have been exceeding great; but at such a *time*, and in such a *manner*, was criminal in the highest degree: it was shameless in the extreme: it was an open defiance both of God and man.]

[a] Numb. xxxi. 16. Rev. ii. 14.

To punish it as it deserved, Phinehas stood forth with holy zeal—

[He seized a javelin, and followed the abandoned criminals to the tent, and pierced them through in the midst of their guilty pleasures. This might appear to have been an usurpation of legal authority: but it was not so: for the chief magistrate himself had given the command to all the judges of Israel: moreover, being the son of the high-priest, it is reasonable to suppose that Phinehas was himself a magistrate: at all events, he acted by a divine impulse, and was "God's minister, a revenger to execute wrath upon these evil-doers." Such an *act* in US would be unjustifiable; because we have received no such commission either from God or man: but the *spirit from which it proceeded*, would be commendable in whomsoever it were found: we *ought* to be filled with a zeal for God's honour: we *ought* to feel indignation against sin: we *ought* to be penetrated with compassion towards those who are in danger of perishing through the impiety of others: and we *ought* to be ready to assist the civil magistrate in the suppression of iniquity.]

God's approbation of his conduct was strongly marked in,

II. The reward conferred upon him—

Instantly was God pacified towards his offending people—

[Already had twenty-three thousand persons fallen by the plague, and another thousand by the sword of justice[b]: but, on the execution of this signal vengeance, God stopped the plague, and commanded the sword of justice to be sheathed. He accepted this as "an atonement for the children of Israel." Not that there was any thing in the blood of the victims, that could expiate sin; but their death was considered as a sacrifice to divine justice; and God took occasion from it to return in mercy to his repenting people. What a glorious reward was this! Not a family throughout all the tribes of Israel could help feeling its obligations to him, and acknowledging him as its benefactor.]

Immediately too did "God give him his covenant of an everlasting priesthood"—

[True it was, that Phinehas was next in succession to the priesthood; but it was not ensured to *him*, and *his* seed, till God now gave it to him by an express promise. The covenant of priesthood is called "a covenant of peace," both because it

[b] Compare ver. 9. with 1 Cor. x. 8.

was a testimony of divine acceptance to Phinehas himself[c], and (as long as the priesthood should last) the means of maintaining peace between God and his people: it also shadowed forth that better priesthood, which should be the means of reconciling the whole world to God, and God unto the world.

This priesthood, we know, was typical of Christ; but, whether the giving of it in consequence of "the atonement made" by Phinehas was typical of him, we cannot say: but this is clear, that the giving of the priesthood to Phinehas, as a reward for the zeal he had exercised, was intended to shew, to the remotest ages, that "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing[d];" and that they who serve God with their *whole hearts*, shall have the most intimate access to him in this world, and participate his glory in the world to come: "they shall be kings and priests unto their God for ever and ever."]

We cannot REFLECT on this history without seeing in a striking point of view,

1. The danger of indulging sin in ourselves—

[Whilst the Israelites were obedient to the divine commands, they were safe: God turned all the execrations of their enemies into blessings[e]. But when they allowed themselves to be tempted by the Midianitish women, they fell from one sin to another, and provoked God himself to become their enemy. Happy will it be for us, if we learn from their experience to resist iniquity in its first approaches; lest we fall and perish after their example. And let not this caution be deemed unworthy the attention of any. If David, and Solomon, were betrayed into the most grievous iniquities by means of their ungoverned appetites, who is he that shall think himself secure? Solomon's description of an abandoned woman is but too just; "Her heart is as snares and nets, and her hands as bands[f]:" he tells us too, that "many strong men have been slain by her; and that her house is the way to hell[g]." Many who once appeared to be in the way to heaven, have found this to their cost: and many of us who are yet out of hell, owe it more to the long-suffering of God than to any virtue of our own. Let such persons then be thankful to God for his mercy; and, "if any man think that he standeth, let him take heed lest he fall."]

2. The duty of restraining sin in others—

[Wherefore were these rewards conferred on Phinehas, but to shew the world the acceptableness of such services as his? And to what purpose has he committed the power of the sword to magistrates, if they are not to be a terror to the workers of iniquity? This power is a talent for which magistrates are

[c] Ps. cvi. 28—31. [d] Gal. iv. 18. [e] Deut. xxiii. 5.
[f] Eccl. vii. 26. [g] Prov. vii. 24—27.

responsible to God: and, if they shrink not from using it, because the exercise of it would subject them to the reproaches of the ungodly, let them bear in mind, that they shall receive commendations from their God; and that, by every friend of piety and of order, they will be reckoned, like Phinehas, the truest patriots of their day. Ministers also, in their respective spheres, should use influence for the suppression of iniquity; boldly rebuking it in public, and using every lawful method of discountenancing it in private. Persons too in every sphere of life should co-operate for the same benevolent purpose; assured that, by obstructing the progress of sin, they approve themselves the best friends both of God and man.]

3. The greatness of our obligations to the Lord Jesus Christ—

[If Phinehas was so great a benefactor to his country, and deserved the thanks of all, for sacrificing the lives of two licentious profligates, what thanks are due to the Lord Jesus Christ, who offered *his own* life a sacrifice for us! Here was love unsearchable, and zeal unparalleled. To him must every human being confess his obligations: to him must every one that shall finally be saved, render everlasting praise and honour. O let every one throughout the camp of Israel behold his Benefactor: let every one contemplate Jesus as appeasing the wrath of God, and effecting our reconciliation with him: and, inasmuch as "for his obedience unto death God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name," let every heart acknowledge him; let every knee bow to him; and every tongue be occupied in ascribing glory to his name.]

## CLXXVIII.

### PERISHING OF THE ISRAELITES IN THE WILDERNESS.

Numb. xxvi. 63—65. *These are they that were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab, by Jordan near Jericho. But among these there was not a man of them whom Moses and Aaron the priest numbered, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai: for the Lord had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. And there was not left a man of them, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.*

THE Israelites in some respects had an advantage over us, inasmuch as they had the most stupendous miracles wrought before their eyes: but we have an incomparably greater advantage over them, in seeing

the accomplishment of many prophecies relating to them, and the design of God in his diversified dispensations towards them. The miracles would strike the senses more forcibly for a little time; but the accomplishment of prophecy commends itself to our judgment, and operates with more permanent effect. The event before us, for instance, carries an irresistible conviction with it to every reflecting mind. The Israelites had been numbered in the wilderness of Sinai[a]: but for their sin at Kadesh-barnea, where they refused to go up and possess the land, they were doomed to die in the wilderness[b]. Two exceptions alone were made, Caleb and Joshua, who had boldly testified against the wickedness of the people on that occasion, and encouraged them to maintain a confidence in their God. Now the time for entering into Canaan was nearly arrived; and Moses and Eleazar were commanded to number the people again, and to ascertain, for the instruction of the nation at large, the perfect accomplishment of this prophecy. Accordingly, it was ascertained by minute investigation, and it is here distinctly affirmed for the benefit of the whole world. The fact that is here asserted, is often mentioned in the New Testament for the benefit of the Church at this day: and it is in this particular view that we shall insist upon it. It was intended to shew us,

I. That sinners derive no security from their numbers—

[There is a conceit in the minds of men, that God can never condemn so many as they see to be walking in the ways of sin: and though they cannot but acknowledge, that the lives of a few religious persons are far more agreeable to the Scriptures than those of the generality of mankind, yet they deem it presumptuous in these to imagine themselves in a safer state than others. As for the distinctions which are made in the word of God, the promises of life to the godly, and the threatening of death to the ungodly, they are accounted of but little weight: men's own surmisings, however groundless, are made to outweigh the plainest declarations of Holy Writ. Here then the matter has been put to a trial. The whole

[a] Numb. i. 1—3. [b] Numb. xiv. 28—30.

nation of Israel had offended God, and were to be excluded from the promised land: but two individuals, who had withstood the torrent of iniquity, were to have the honour and happiness of entering into Canaan. Now on the borders of that land the people are numbered a second time; and after a complete survey of every tribe, it is declared, yea *twice* declared, that "*not a man*" against whom the judgment had been denounced, had survived. Thus it will assuredly be in the eternal world. Men are now told that the unrighteous shall not enter into heaven: but, because they constitute the great mass of mankind, they doubt whether the threatening will be executed: nevertheless, when a scrutiny shall be made of those who shall be at the right hand of God, there will not be found a man, no, "*not a man*," whom God in his word had consigned to another place. The "broad and frequented road will be found to have led to destruction;" nor will so much as one have attained to life, who did not "enter in at the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way[c]."]

II. That no outward privileges or professions will save them—

[*In this view in particular is the destruction of the Israelites proposed to our consideration in the New Testament*[d]. Their privileges were exceeding great, and they could boast of having experienced the most marvellous interpositions of the Deity in their behalf. But were they *therefore* saved? Yea, was not God so offended with them, that he even "sware in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest?" To what purpose then is it that we have been baptized into the name of Christ; that we have his word in our hands, his presence in our assemblies, his promises on our lips? To what purpose is it that we have "eaten spiritual meat, and drunk spiritual drink," at his table, if we are yet children of disobedience? Were the Jews rejected for their unbelief? So shall *we* be, if we have not that "faith, which purifies the heart." If "Christ be not formed in our hearts," so as to make us "partakers of a divine nature," "the labour bestowed upon us will be in vain." We must "live by faith on the Son of God," and "walk as Christ himself walked," or else we shall never find admission into his rest. Nor is it by "running well for a season," but "by a patient continuance in well-doing," that we shall attain eternal life. We must both begin well, and "endure unto the end," if ever we would be counted worthy of that heavenly kingdom.]

III. That the divine judgments, however long delayed, will overtake them at last—

[c] Matt. vii. 13, 14.

[d] Jude, ver. 5. and 1 Cor. x. 1—6. and Heb. iii. 17—19. and iv. 1.

[Though at first, when sent back into the wilderness, the people confessed their sins with apparent contrition, they soon relapsed into their former habits; and probably after a season indulged a hope, that they should succeed as well as those to whom the promises had been made. This is the way of sinners: "because judgment is not executed speedily upon them," they think it never will. "The scoffers in the last days will say, Where is the promise of his coming?" But God assures us, that "the judgment of sinners now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." God had respect to the posterity of Israel, when "he suffered their manners in the wilderness forty years:" he had a chosen seed who were yet in their loins, and who were in due time to enjoy that inheritance, which their fathers had despised. "He gave them also space for repentance," that they might not be excluded from heaven itself. Thus "is he long-suffering towards *us* also, not willing that any of us should perish, but that we should come to repentance and live." But we deceive ourselves, if we think that he will never call us into judgment: on the contrary, he will require at our hands every talent he has entrusted to us, and increase our punishment in proportion to the mercies we have abused. O that those who are more advanced in life would contemplate this! that they would "account the long-suffering of God to be salvation," and not make it the occasion of a more aggravated condemnation!]

## IV. That no one of God's faithful servants shall ever perish—

[At this numbering of the people, Caleb and Joshua were found alive, though all the rest were dead: so exactly had death executed its commission! Of six hundred thousand offenders, not one had escaped its dart: but the two who had "followed the Lord fully," remained unhurt. This shews how certainly the promises of God shall be fulfilled to every believer. Be the numbers of the Lord's people ever so few, they shall not be overlooked: though the whole universe be sifted and blown away as chaff, "not the smallest grain of true wheat shall fall upon the earth[e]." They have many and powerful adversaries; but "none shall pluck them out of their Father's hand." "It is not His will that one of his little ones should perish." They may be so weak in faith as to indulge many fears of the issue of their warfare; but God himself pledges his word, that "they shall never perish, but shall have eternal life." Be not discouraged then, believers, because ye are few, or weak, or despised, or beset with enemies all around; for the word of Christ to

[e] Amos ix. 9.

you is, "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Only "commit your souls to God in well-doing, as into the hands of a faithful Creator," and he will "preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom."]

## CLXXIX.

### APPOINTMENT OF JOSHUA TO SUCCEED MOSES.

Numb. xxvii. 15—21. *And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation: and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honour upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him, after the judgment of Urim before the Lord. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation.*

WHEN great and good men are taken away, we are apt to suppose that their places cannot be adequately supplied. But God "has the residue of the Spirit," and can raise up instruments at any time to carry on his gracious purposes in the world. When Elijah was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot, his servant Elisha was ready to imagine, that all the stay and support of Israel was removed; "My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" but Elijah's mantle fell upon Elisha. Thus, when Moses had received God's final decision respecting his dying in the wilderness, it seemed as if the nation of Israel would be left as sheep without a shepherd: but God, in answer to the prayer of Moses, appointed one to succeed him, who fulfilled his trust as well as Moses himself could have done.

The points for our present consideration are,

I. The concern of Moses for the people committed to him—

The last forty years of his life he had spent entirely in their service: and now that he could superintend them no longer, he was anxious that a successor should be appointed by God himself; that so all occasion for rivalship might be cut off, and all discord and anarchy be prevented. In this he acted,

1. As a true patriot—

[Patriotism is a virtue which all public men affect, but which very few possess. Selfishness is by far the more prevailing character. Many, when they can hold the reins of government no longer, would rather be succeeded by one of moderate talents, whose inferiority should cause regret for their departed worth, than by one of transcendent abilities, whose eminence should eclipse their virtues, and cause their services to be forgotten. A regard for their own credit would outweigh their desire for the public weal. Besides, the generality of patriots exert all their influence to aggrandize their own families; and appoint to places of trust and honour, not those whom in their consciences they think most fit for the office, but those who from family or party considerations will most confirm their power, or perpetuate the honour of their name. The very reverse of all this was displayed in the conduct of Moses. He was fearful lest the people should have any reason to regret his loss. He was anxious that a person should be selected and qualified by God himself; that so the administration of their affairs might be conducted to the greatest possible advantage. And though he had children of his own, he placed them in no peculiar situation either of church or state; but left them to occupy the humbler post of common Levites, whilst Aaron's children succeeded to the priesthood, and one of another tribe was nominated as his successor in the government. Moreover, *the manner of evincing his concern* for the people's welfare, was such as is little known to modern patriots; he evinced it not by declamatory harangues, but by *praying to God for them.* Happy would it be, if those who in this day make such professions of zeal in the service of their country, would manifest it before God in their secret chamber, entreating HIM to direct their counsels and prosper their endeavours! To secure his direction and blessing for those in power, would be a better proof of patriotism, than to be aiming incessantly at their subversion and ruin.]

2. As a faithful minister—

[Moses presided over Israel, both as a Church, and as a Nation: and he shewed the same regard for their spiritual, as for their temporal, interests. He well knew, that the appointment of a truly religious governor would equally conduce to

their good in both respects. Hence he prayed, that God would set one over them, who should "go in and out before them," leading them by his example, as well as directing them by his authority: and though doubtless this might principally refer to the wars which they were about to wage, yet it certainly comprehended also every part of the governor's office, whether civil or religious. Such is the prayer which every pious minister must offer, when he finds the time of his dissolution drawing nigh. He must not be satisfied with having discharged his own duties conscientiously, but must "labour earnestly for them in prayer," desiring to have his flock committed to one, who shall watch over them with diligence, and minister unto them with fidelity; one, who will not merely *direct* them aright, but will *go before* them in the way, as the eastern shepherds were wont to do. In this he must manifest his resemblance to the Saviour, who "had compassion on the people, because they were as sheep having no shepherd[a]:" in this too he must follow the footsteps of the Apostles, who strove, both by oral and written communications, to perpetuate the effect of their labours[b].]

How pleasing and acceptable this intercession was, we see in,

II. The gracious provision which God made for them—

Here, as in ten thousand instances, God answered without delay the petitions presented to him—

1. He selected a suitable person for the office—

["Take Joshua," says he, "a man in whom is the Spirit." Yes, such are the magistrates and ministers whom *God* appoints: he selects those in whom are suitable qualifications for the post assigned them, or, at least, persons whom he himself will fit for their office. A talent for government is implied in this expression, but it implies also real piety; which is absolutely requisite for a due discharge either of the magisterial or ministerial office. None can act *for* God, who do not act *from* him, that is, by grace received from him: and consequently, none can make the best use of their authority, who are not taught by the Spirit to use it for the furtherance of religion, and for the glory of God. O that such persons were universally selected to manage the concerns both of church and state! We might hope for a far richer blessing on the nation at large, and far infinitely greater good to the Church of Christ, if such persons, and such only, were invested with the sword of magistracy, or the pastoral staff. At all events, both magistrates and ministers may learn from hence, what qualification they

[a] Matt. ix. 36. [b] Acts xx. 25—32. 2 Pet. i. 12—15.

should chiefly seek, for a profitable discharge of their respective offices.]

2. He prescribed the mode of his ordination to it—

[" Set him before Eleazar, and before all the congregation," said the Lord; " and lay thine hand upon him, and give him a charge in their sight, and put some of thine honour upon him;" that is, invest him *now*, before thy death, with a part of thine own authority; that all, seeing whom I have chosen, may acknowledge him as their governor, and render a willing obedience to his commands. This mode of ordaining Joshua was calculated to answer every end that could be wished. It effectually prevented all competition, and strengthened his hands for the arduous employment that was assigned him: and we may well suppose that Joshua would be deeply impressed with these ceremonies, and long retain a remembrance of the charge given him, confirmed as it was by an additional charge from God himself[c]. Nor is this mode of appointing Joshua uninstructive to us; for, a similar mode of consecrating persons to divine offices has ever since obtained in the Church of God. The deacons who were first ordained by the Apostles, to superintend the temporal concerns of the Church, were set apart in this way[d]: and both priests and elders were afterwards consecrated with nearly the same forms[e]. And may we not hope that similar effects are still produced on the minds of many at their solemn consecration to the work of the ministry? We have no doubt they are: and, on the Ember-days, which are especially set apart for praying to God in behalf of those who are to be ordained, a still richer blessing would rest upon them; and the imposition of hands be accompanied with a more abundant communication of the Holy Spirit to their souls[f].]

3. He promised him all needful assistance in it—

[It must of necessity be, that in the government of that people many cases would arise, wherein he would need direction from above. Moses had on such occasions enjoyed immediate access to the Deity. But another mode of communication had been fixed by God for all succeeding governors. The Urim and Thummim (which import *light* and *perfection*) were in the breast-plate, which was worn by the high-priest; and by means of that breast-plate, God, in some way unknown to us, revealed his will. To Joshua he particularly promised, that he would communicate to him in this way all needful information: so that, whatever difficulties might arise, he should have infallible means of ascertaining the mind of God. Doubtless that method

[c] Deut. xxxi. 7, 8, 14, 15, 23.
[d] Acts vi. 3, 6. [e] 1 Tim. iv. 14. Acts xiv. 23.
[f] Compare Deut. xxxiv. 9. with 2 Tim. i. 6.

of obtaining instruction is now at an end: but the prayer of faith will yet prevail, so that God's ministers and people shall not seek his face in vain. If they truly desire his direction, they shall be preserved from any important error, and be guided into all necessary truth: "The meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way."]

From this subject we may clearly LEARN,

1. The blessedness of the Christian church—

[How happy were the Jews to have such an intercessor as Moses, and such a governor as Joshua! Follow Joshua in his course, from the moment of his appointment to the moment of his death: what a series of victories, till he had conquered the land, and distributed it according to the divine purpose! But if we envy the Jews their divinely-appointed head, what objects of envy must *we* be, who have the Lord Jesus Christ himself for our Head! He is the true Joshua, to whom "the Spirit is given without measure[g]." He also is made "Head of the Church," and is "ascended up on high, that he may fill all things;" and through him the very weakest of his people shall be "more than conquerors." Let us then "be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might," and not doubt but that "he will bruise Satan under our feet shortly."]

2. The duty of advancing in every possible way its best interests—

[If we be magistrates or ministers, our duty is proportionably difficult, and our responsibility proportionably awful. O that all who have been placed in such offices, felt as they ought the obligations that are upon them! Let ministers in particular, who have a far greater charge than that of magistrates committed to them, give themselves up wholly to the execution of their trust. Let them fear lest the blood of those who die in their sins, be laid to their charge. And let them so fulfil their ministry, that they may give up their account with joy, and not with grief.]

[g] Isai. xi. 2, 3. John iii. 34.

## CLXXX.

### THE MORNING AND EVENING SACRIFICE.

Numb. xxviii. 3—10. *Thou shalt say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which ye shall offer unto the Lord; two lambs of the first year without spot, day by day, for a continual burnt-offering. The one lamb shalt thou offer in the morning, and the other lamb shalt thou offer at even; and a tenth part of an ephah of flour for a meat-offering, mingled with the*

*fourth part of an hin of beaten oil. It is a continual burnt-offering, which was ordained in Mount Sinai for a sweet savour, a sacrifice made by fire unto the Lord. And the drink-offering thereof shall be the fourth part of an hin for the one lamb: in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured unto the Lord for a drink-offering. And the other lamb shalt thou offer at even: as the meat-offering of the morning, and as the drink-offering thereof, thou shalt offer it, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord. And on the Sabbath-day, two lambs of the first year without spot, and two tenth-deals of flour for a meat-offering, mingled with oil, and the drink-offering thereof. This is the burnt-offering of every Sabbath, beside the continual burnt-offering, and his drink-offering.*

THIS burnt-offering, our text informs us, "was ordained in Mount Sinai," nearly forty years before the period at which it was again enjoined[a]. Commentators are not agreed respecting the reason of its being again so circumstantially repeated. Some have thought that the observance of this ordinance had been entirely neglected in the wilderness; and that from hence arose the necessity of enjoining it again, in order that it might not be neglected when they should come into the land of Canaan. Nor is this opinion without some foundation: for the prophet Amos, and after him the first martyr, Stephen, complains of the most grievous neglect of duty among the Israelites in the wilderness, and of their worshipping idols in preference to the living God: "It is written in the book of the Prophets," says Stephen, "O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon[b]." But it is altogether incredible that Moses should have suffered such a public dereliction of duty as this: and, if he had, it is impossible that God should have spoken of him as a servant "faithful in all his house." We apprehend therefore that it was not of *these* sacrifices which depended

[a] Exod. xxix. 38—41. [b] Amos v. 25—27. Acts vii. 42, 43.

upon Aaron and Moses, but of *other* sacrifices which depended more upon the people, and which they had neglected to offer on the proper occasions, that the prophet speaks: and consequently, that there was some other reason for renewing the appointment of the ordinance before us. The true reason seems to be, that, as all who had come out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, had perished in the wilderness, and as Aaron was dead, and Moses himself had but two or three months to live, it was desirable that this new generation should have this ordinance enjoined from God himself, that they might be duly impressed with a sense of its great importance. The repetition of it moreover is of use to us, inasmuch as it shews us, that some deep mystery must be contained in it, and that much valuable instruction is to be derived from it. Let us then consider,

I. The matter of which this offering consisted—

There were two very distinct offerings united;

1. The lamb—

[This was to be "of the first year," and "without spot;" and it was to be slain, and then consumed by fire upon the altar, as "a sacrifice of a sweet savour unto the Lord."

Can any one doubt what this imported? Can any one fail to see in this a type of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom one Apostle speaks of as "a lamb without blemish, and without spot[c];" and another Apostle represents as "THE Lamb," even "THE Lamb that was slain[d]," to whom all the glorified saints in heaven ascribe the honour of their salvation, saying, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto THE LAMB[e]!" It is worthy of observation, that the very first sacrifices of which any mention is made in Scripture, were *lambs*. It was "of the firstlings of his flock" that Abel offered; and by that offering he obtained very peculiar tokens of God's favour and acceptance[f]. And there is reason to believe, that the skins, with which Adam and Eve were, by God's appointment, clothed immediately after the fall, were of lambs which they had previously offered in sacrifice[g]: and in reference to this early appointment, as well as to the everlasting decrees of God, the Lord Jesus is called "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world[h]." We shall not detain you in order

[c] 1 Pet. i. 19. [d] Rev. v. 8, 9. [e] Rev. vii. 10.
[f] Gen. iv. 4. with Heb. xi. 4. [g] Gen. iii. 21. [h] Rev. xiii. 8.

to point out the correspondence between Christ and these spotless lambs, in the perfection of his nature, in the holiness of his life, or in the intent of his death: but, passing by these things as known and understood among you[i], we shall content ourselves with saying, that, in this offering, there was *virtually* the same proclamation made to the Jews, as was afterwards *expressly* made by John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world[k]!"]

2. The meat-offering and the drink-offering—

[With the lamb a portion of flour, about three quarts, was to be offered, mixed up with somewhat more than a quart of beaten oil: and whilst they and the lamb were burning together upon the altar, some strong generous wine, (of equal quantity with the oil,) was to be poured out as a libation: and the whole together being consumed by fire, was "of sweet savour unto the Lord."

The meaning of this is not so clear as that which relates to the lamb. It may possibly be a tribute of thanksgiving to God for all his mercies, which are comprehended under the terms, "corn, and wine, and oil:" and, in that view, the ordidance will be a compound of prayer and praise, corresponding with that injunction of St. Paul, "in every thing by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known unto God[l]." But we rather suppose that there is an allusion made here to feasts, of which corn and wine and oil were very distinguished parts: and that the consumption of these upon the altar was intended to convey the idea, that God himself feasted with his people, and would always meet them with tokens of his love, whensoever they came to him as sinners, trusting in the atonement that should in due time be offered for them. This interpretation is clearly countenanced by the gracious promises which God made, when first he instituted this ordinance on Mount Sinai; saying, "There will I meet you, to speak there unto thee: and there will I meet with the children of Israel; and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory[m]." In this view the ordinance is most instructive; in that it announces the truths proclaimed afterwards by the voice of Christ himself, "No man cometh unto the Father but by ME;" and, "him that cometh unto ME, I will in no wise cast out[n]."]

That which distinguishes this offering from all others will be found particularly in,

[i] If this Discourse were delivered in a congregation that was unaccustomed to hear such subjects treated of, the parallel should be distinctly drawn. [k] John i. 29, 36. [l] Phil. iv. 6.
[m] Exod. xxix. 42. 43. [n] John vi. 37. and xiv. 6.

II. The manner in which it was presented—

Many offerings were only occasional; but this was stated, and was renewed daily throughout the year. The things to which we would more particularly call your attention are,

1. The union of the different materials—

[Meat-offerings and drink-offerings were indeed sometimes offered with other sacrifices; and sometimes also by themselves: but here they were constantly presented and consumed with the lamb. Now, if we regard them as expressions of gratitude to God, they shew, that with our acknowledgments of guilt we should invariably render unto God a tribute of praise. If, on the other hand, we regard them as presented unto God in order that by the consumption of them on his altar he may express, as it were, his communion with us, and his acceptance of us, then they shew, that, in our applications for mercy through the Redeemer's sacrifice, we should draw nigh to God with a confidence of finding favour in his sight. Now such an union of feelings and dispositions in our hearts is most desirable. We are not so to lean to the side of humiliation as to encourage despondency, nor so to confide in God as to lose all our tenderness and contrition: but we should at all times "rejoice with trembling[o]," and tremble with rejoicing.]

2. The frequency with which they were offered—

[Every morning and every evening were they to be offered throughout the year; and from this circumstance they were called "a *continual* burnt-offering." Now there were two things in particular, which this circumstance was calculated to impress on the people's minds; the one was their *continual need* of an atoning sacrifice; the other was, the *continued efficacy* of that which should in due time be offered. Not a day passed but they were repeatedly reminded, even the whole congregation, that they were sinners before God, and must seek salvation through Him whom this offering typified: (O that *we* also might bear in mind that salutary lesson!) they were reminded too that there was in this sacrifice a sufficiency for the sins of the whole world. Not the greatest sinner in all Israel was excepted, if he did but really with penitential sorrow seek for pardon in this way: nor, as long as the world shall stand, shall any one plead the merits of the Redeemer's sacrifice in vain. The shadows were repeated, because they were shadows: but Christ who is the substance, has made a complete atonement for the sins of the whole world, and "by one offering of himself hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified[p]."]

[o] Ps. ii. 11. [p] Heb. x. 14.

3. The increase of them on the Sabbath-day—

[This is particularly noticed in the text: the lambs, and the meat and drink-offerings, were doubled on that day. What a reverence for the Sabbath was this calculated to inspire! It shewed to all, that though that day is a day of rest from worldly business, it ought to be a day of peculiar exertion in the things of God. Then should all the faculties of the soul be summoned to the service, or, I should rather say, to the enjoyment, of God. We should keep a holy feast unto him, and seek a more abundant measure of communion with him. In the closet, in the family, in the public assembly, we should be endeavouring to advance his glory: in a word, we should labour to spend the whole day, as it were, in "fellowship with him, and with his Son, Jesus Christ." Not that we need to be all the day in *acts* of devotion; it is the *habit*, which we should particularly attend to; and we may vary our services, so as to render them all more easy and delightful — — — Shall it be thought that under the Gospel this strictness is not necessary? We answer, that, though the ceremonial part of the Sabbath is superseded, the moral part remains; and, on that, as well as every other day, our sacrifices, instead of being diminished, should be increased. It is of the times of the Gospel that Ezekiel speaks, though in terms taken from the law: and the attentive reader will see, that more is required of us than of the Jews; and that both our services and enjoyments should be augmented in proportion to our superior advantages[q]. Let not us be sparing of our services, and God will not be sparing of his communications[r].]

[q] Ezek. xlvi. 14. on common days; and Ezek. xlvi. 4, 5. on the Sabbath-day. [r] Isai. lxiv. 5.

## CLXXXI.

### DESTRUCTION OF THE MIDIANITES.

Numb. xxxi. 48—50. *And the officers which were over thousands of the host, the captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, came near unto Moses: and they said unto Moses, Thy servants have taken the sum of the men of war which are under our charge, and there lacketh not one man of us. We have therefore brought an oblation for the Lord, what every man hath gotten, of jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, ear-rings, and tablets, to make an atonement for our souls before the Lord.*

NUMBERLESS are the occasions on which we are led to admire the condescension of God towards

his chosen servants: and one of considerable importance occurs in the chapter before us. He had doomed Moses to die in the wilderness without ever setting his foot upon the promised land: and the time was nearly come for the execution of the sentence upon him. But God graciously determined to give him an earnest of those blessings which were shortly to be poured out on the surviving generation. He therefore directed Moses to "avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites, before he should be gathered unto his people." Moses gives immediate orders to carry into effect the divine command: but he remarkably alters the language which Jehovah had used. *God* had said, "Avenge *the children of Israel* of the Midianites:" and *he* says, "Avenge *the Lord* of Midian." The Lord marked his tender concern for Israel's good; but Moses shewed a paramount concern for the glory of his God[a]. Thus it is that the condescension and kindness of God should ever be received: and whilst He seeks the best interests of his people, we should seek his glory above every other consideration: to *that* every interest of ours should be subordinated.

The order being issued, a thousand from every tribe went forth to battle: (for, when God was with them, it was alike easy to subdue their enemies with many or with few:) and Phinehas, who had displayed his zeal for God in the matter of Zimri and Cozbi, was sent with them to animate their exertions. We have no particular account of the engagement; but the consequences of it are minutely detailed, and may, not unprofitably, be distinctly considered. We notice,

I. Their victory over Midian—

[This was most complete. All the five kings who came out against them were slain; and all their forces destroyed. That all Midian did not come to the battle, appears from this, that in two hundred years afterwards they were again a powerful nation: but all who engaged in this conflict were destroyed, their cities also were taken, and their fortresses demolished. "Balaam also," who, though foiled in his former endeavours, had returned to them, "was slain amongst them with the sword."

[a] Compare ver. 2 and 3.

Now this victory is instructive, whether we regard it in an historical, or typical, view. *As an historical fact*, it teaches us, that no power can withstand the arm of the Lord; that, when aided by him, we are infallibly sure of victory; and that all who determinately set themselves against him shall perish. They may boast of their knowledge, and may wish to "die the death of the righteous;" but they shall surely be numbered with the enemies of God at last. *As a type*, it shews us what shall ultimately be the fate of all our spiritual enemies. Our strength may appear as nothing in comparison of theirs; but it shall prevail, and our exertions be crowned with perfect victory.]

## II. Their slaughter of the captives—

[On the return of the Israelites from battle, Moses went forth to meet them; but finding that they had not slain the women with the men, but had taken them, together with the male children, captives, he was much displeased; and ordered them to destroy all, except the females who were virgins. Our natural compassion for the weak and helpless makes us to shudder at such an order as this: and to wonder how the soldiers could be induced to carry it into execution. But we must remember that God has a right over his creatures, to take them away at any time and in any manner that he sees fit. Whether he sweep them away by a pestilence, or cut them off by the sword, he is no more to be accused of harshness towards them, than if he take them away by the more common means of disease and age. It must be remembered too, that the women in particular had forfeited their lives by tempting the Israelites to whoredom and idolatry. Already had they occasioned the destruction of twenty-four thousand Israelites; and, if suffered to live, might have successfully renewed their former practices. It was necessary therefore in that view also to cut them off, both mothers and daughters indiscriminately; all having, either by action or connivance, been accessary to Israel's ruin. As for the male children, they, though not actually involved in their parents' iniquities, were justly, as in almost all cases they must be, involved in their parents' punishment. With respect to the Israelites themselves, they were no more to be blamed, than any persons are who act as executioners under the orders of the civil magistrate. No one condemns the jury who by their verdict subject their fellow-creatures to the penalty of death; nor the judge who pronounces sentence; nor the jailer who confines the criminal; nor the officers who attend the execution; nor the man that employs the instrument of death. No one condemns the angel who destroyed the Egyptian first-born, nor him who in one night slew a hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army: nor can any one justly condemn the Israelites, who executed the divine command in the

slaughter of their captives. The case was peculiar, and not applicable to modern warfare; nor was it intended as an *example* to us: but, as a *lesson*, it is of great importance; since it shews us, that peculiar judgments await those who tempt others to sin: and that, though they may escape for a time, the most signal vengeance shall fall on them at last. It teaches us also (for this, as well as the foregoing, circumstance admits of a *typical* application) that we must destroy *all* our spiritual enemies without exception; not those only that seem more immediately to menace our destruction, but those also, which, though apparently weak and insignificant, may warp us from our duty, or in time become strong and formidable.]

III. Their dedication of the spoils—

[Immense were the spoils taken on this occasion: and the distribution of them which God appointed, seemed to afford universal satisfaction. Half was given to the congregation at large, and half was reserved for the host that took them. From each was a tribute taken for God: from the half belonging to the congregation, a fiftieth part; and from that belonging to the warriors, a five hundredth part. This shews us, that God must have a portion of all that his providence has allotted to us: whether we earn it ourselves, or receive it as the fruit of others' labour, God must be acknowledged in it, and be glorified with it.

But, on mustering the troops, a most wonderful fact was ascertained. Notwithstanding only twelve thousand went to the war, and the enemy whom they attacked were so numerous, and their success had been so great, not one single man was missing from their ranks. This filled them with utter astonishment, and with the most lively gratitude: and all with one accord desired to make their acknowledgments to God, by dedicating to him a part, if not the whole, of the gold and jewels which they had taken, every man for himself. Accordingly, the whole of the spoil having been purified either by fire or water, and the soldiers themselves also having been purified from the pollution which the slaughter of so many persons, and the touching of the dead, had occasioned, the gold and jewels were presented unto God for the service of his sanctuary, "*as an atonement for their souls.*" The word "atonement" which is here used, is not to be understood as importing *an expiatory sacrifice*, but only (as it is afterwards explained) "*a memorial.*" These spoils were presented, precisely as the half shekel, or "atonement-money," was appointed to be, in commemoration of a most wonderful deliverance[b]. The Israelites presented them, first, as *an acknowledgment of their desert;* (for they deserved death, no less than the people whom they had destroyed:) next, as *a memorial of their deliverance;* (which was

[b] Exod. xxx. 12—16.

truly astonishing:) and lastly, as *a testimony of their gratitude;* a sense of which they desired to retain to the end of life; and to transmit to their latest posterity.

O that there were in all of us such an heart! that we could see in such a view our obligations to God! and that we were thus forward to express our sense of them in every possible way! The preservation of *our* lives is not indeed so manifest, as in their case; but it is not at all less the work of God. Think of the diseases and accidents to which *we* have been exposed, and the havoc made by them on those around us; and you shall see that we, no less than the Israelites, are indebted for our lives to the good providence of our God. Apply the same thought to our *souls;* and then say, whether we have not as abundant calls for gratitude, as they——— How then shall we testify our gratitude to God? I answer, Whatsoever he has given to us for a prey, *that* let us present to him for a sacrifice of thanksgiving. Has he given us time, and health, and money, and influence; and, above all, has he infused an heavenly life into our souls? let us devote it all to him, and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his." The Israelites thought their jewels would be ill employed as ornaments for their wives or daughters, when they might be of use for the service and honour of God: thus should we also estimate whatever we possess; not by the gratification it will afford to our pride and vanity, but by the good it will enable us to do to our fellow-creatures, and the service in which it may be employed for our heavenly Benefactor. This only would I observe in relation to it, that we must *first* give up *ourselves* to God, and *then* our *property*[c]. Without our hearts no sacrifice whatever will be accepted of him: but if we "give *ourselves* to him as living sacrifices, we shall perform a holy, a reasonable, and an acceptable service[d]:" and every victory we gain, together with every blessing we enjoy, whether public and national, or private and personal, demands it at our hands.]

[c] 2 Cor. viii. 5. [d] Rom. xii. 1.

## CLXXXII.

### MOSES REPROVES THE REUBENITES.

Numb. xxxii. 6, 7. *And Moses said unto the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the Lord hath given them?*

ACTIONS are good or evil according to the motives from which they proceed: but, as these are known

only to God, it must often happen that our conduct is either viewed in too favourable a light, or subjected to unmerited censure. Our inability to dive into the hearts of men should certainly incline us at all times to lean rather to the side of charity, and to hope and believe all things of a favourable nature, as far as circumstances will admit. This consideration however is not to operate so far as to blind our eyes to what is manifestly evil, or to keep us from reproving those who act amiss. Magistrates in particular must proceed with firmness in suppressing wickedness of every kind, and by timely interference must stop the contagion of bad example. Thus did Moses, when the Reubenites and Gadites presented a request to him, which he deemed injurious to all the other tribes. They asked to have the land on the east side of Jordan for their portion, instead of any part of the land of Canaan: and Moses, conceiving their request to proceed from improper and unjustifiable motives, expostulated with them, and reproved them with great severity. Let us consider,

I. The grounds of his jealousy—

There was ample reason for the fears he entertained respecting them—

[Their request seemed to be dictated by *selfishness*, *worldliness*, and *unbelief*. As soon as Sihon king of the Amorites, and Og the king of Bashan were subdued, and their fertile territories were seized, these two tribes requested to have the exclusive possession of their land, under a pretence that it was pre-eminently suited to them, on account of the number of their flocks and herds. As for their brethren belonging to the other ten tribes, let *them* go and fight their way among the Canaanites, and get possession of whatever they could: but the land which was already subdued, and which was of the richest quality, they desired to have allotted to themselves without any further trouble.

This land was not within the precincts of Canaan: moreover, it would be far removed from the ordinances of religion and from the house of God: but they did not seem to regard either of these considerations in comparison of an ample, easy, and immediate settlement.

The inhabitants of the promised land were exceeding numerous and warlike; and could never be dispossessed without

many sanguinary contests. Perhaps, after all, the victory over them might be dearly purchased, or possibly might never be attained: hence also might arise the willingness of the suitors to forego their share in what was uncertain, if they might be permitted to possess what was already gained.

Such was the construction which Moses put upon the conduct of these two tribes, and such was the ground of those reproofs which he administered.]

And is there not ground for similar fears whenever a similar conduct obtains?

[If a minister at this day see his hearers *selfish*, mindful of their own comforts, but inattentive to the wants and miseries of others, has he not reason to fear concerning them? When it is eminently characteristic of the true Christian to "mind, not his own things, but the things of others[a]," and there is a manifest failure in this respect amongst his people, ought he not to be "jealous over them with a godly jealousy," and to warn them of their self-deceit?

Again, if he observe any professors of religion to have become *worldly*; if he find them so intent on their present interests, as to be comparatively indifferent about the ordinances of religion, and the ultimate possession of the heavenly land; if he see them studious of their present ease, and averse to spiritual conflicts, must he not of necessity "stand in doubt of" such persons? Does not love itself require him to "change his voice towards them," and to adopt the language of admonition and reproof?

Once more, if he see them yielding to *unbelief*, and resting satisfied with a present portion, through desponding apprehensions respecting the attainment of a better inheritance, does it become him to be silent? Ought he not to exert himself in every way to repress such a spirit, and to stimulate his people to a more becoming conduct? Must he wait for open and notorious transgressions before he opens his lips in expostulations and reproofs? No surely: the example of Moses in the text, and of St. Paul on various occasions[b], shews, what are the emotions which every such instance should produce, and what methods every faithful minister should adopt to counteract such evils.]

Whilst we justify Moses on reviewing the grounds of his jealousy, we shall find reason to congratulate him on,

II. The effects of it—

From himself it produced a faithful remonstrance—

[a] Phil. ii. 4. [b] 2 Cor. xi. 2. Gal. iv. 19, 20.

[It is but too common to express our fears and jealousies to others, and to conceal them from the person who is the subject of them. But Moses abhorred any such concealment: he felt the importance of suggesting all his fears to those who were most interested in being made acquainted with them; and he accordingly addressed himself to the people themselves.

He set before them the pernicious tendency of their example, which was calculated to discourage all the children of Israel: he also reminded them of the similar conduct of their fathers, which had involved them all in one common ruin; and assured them, that they would bring a similar destruction on the present generation, if they persisted in such unreasonable desires[c].

Thus he acted like a true friend, and a faithful servant of the Lord. It was thus that St. Paul also acted towards Peter, when by a temporizing and timid policy he was endangering the liberty of the Christian Church: and thus also are we to act, agreeably to that precept, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and shalt not suffer sin upon him[d]."]

From them it called forth a satisfactory explanation—

[They did not, on the one hand, either acknowledge, or deny, the fault imputed to them; nor on the other hand, did they take the slightest offence at it. But for the satisfaction of Moses they voluntarily engaged to accompany their brethren in arms, and even to go before them to the battle; and to continue with them till the whole land should be subdued, and every tribe should be in possession of its destined inheritance. This was fair and equitable: and Moses readily acquiesced in the proposal. He warned them however, that, if they should ever recede from their purpose, and violate their engagement, "their sin should surely find them out," and be visited upon them.

Thus were matters settled to the satisfaction of all parties: the jealousy of Moses evinced his concern for their welfare; and, if it did not give birth to the proposal which was made, it certainly confirmed the people in their determination to execute it with boldness and fidelity. A similar instance of jealousy towards these very tribes occurred, when they were returning to their families after the conquest of Canaan[e]. On that occasion indeed they were evidently blameless, notwithstanding the appearances were, as in the present case, very much against them. But the issue in both was happy: and we learn from both to admonish with candour, and to receive admonitions with humble gratitude; being more intent on satisfying the minds of those who are offended, than on lowering our accusers by any recriminations.]

[c] ver. 6—15. [d] Lev. xix. 17. [e] Josh. xxii. 11—33.

This subject will naturally furnish us with some important HINTS:—

1. Maintain on all occasions a jealousy over yourselves—

[The heart is justly said to be "deceitful above all things:" and "Satan can easily transform himself into an angel of light." Even the Apostles themselves on some occasions "knew not what spirit they were of:" they supposed themselves actuated by pure and holy zeal, when they were influenced by nothing but pride and revenge. It is highly probable that these two tribes took credit to themselves for far more disinterestedness than they possessed; and that Moses saw more of their real disposition, than they themselves were aware of. This appears from the solemn charge which Moses gave them, even after he had acceded to their proposal. And we are sure that this is frequently the case amongst ourselves: under the idea of a prudential regard for our families and our property, we are very apt to indulge a worldly and selfish spirit; and to be unconscious of evils which are but too visible to others. Let us remember this: we see it in others; let us guard against it in ourselves — — —]

2. Be ready to assign the reasons of your conduct to others—

[It may easily happen that our conduct may appear to others in a more unfavourable light than it ought; and if they knew our real views, they would form a different judgment respecting it. Now then we should not be angry with them because they express their doubts respecting any particular action; but should be ready to satisfy their minds, precisely as we would, if they inquired into the grounds of our faith[f]. The Apostle Peter, when called to an account by all the other Apostles for "going to uncircumcised Gentiles and eating with them," thought it no degradation to assign his reasons to them, but was glad of an opportunity of removing their misapprehensions[g]. Though they seemed to have been somewhat hasty in condemning him, he was not angry with them: he knew the purity of their motives, and felt a pleasure in declaring to them the designs of God towards the Gentile world. Happy would it be for us, if there were in all of us such a mind as this. But, alas! the quick sensibility which is manifested by us when any fault is pointed out; our extreme backwardness to acknowledge it, and our proneness to condemn our monitors rather than ourselves, render the duty of admonishing one another extremely difficult. Let us however cultivate

[f] 1 Pet. iii. 15. [g] Acts xi. 2—4.

a better spirit, and "esteem it a kindness, if the righteous smite and reprove us:" let us receive their admonitions "as an excellent oil, which shall not break our head[h]," but rather heal the wounds which our own misconduct may have occasioned.]

3. Endeavour so to walk, that your actions may carry their own evidence along with them—

[In some circumstances our actions must of necessity be open to misconstruction. St. Paul in circumcising Timothy and not Titus, and in "becoming all things to all men," must appear to many to be guilty of inconsistency. But his general spirit would bear such ample testimony to the integrity of his mind, that all candid persons must at least withhold their censures, even when they could not discern the exact propriety of his conduct. Where there was real danger of his laying a stumbling-block before others, he invariably leaned to the safer side, and would deny himself in things that were most innocent, rather than by indulgence ensnare the consciences of others[i]. Thus should we endeavour to act. We should "abstain from all appearance of evil." We should be careful that our "good may not be evil spoken of[k]." In a word, we should "be circumspect in all things;" and "so make our light to shine before men, that all who behold it may be constrained to glorify our Father which is in heaven."]

[h] Ps. cxli. 5. [i] 1 Cor. viii. 13. [k] Rom. xiv. 16.

## CLXXXIII.

THE CERTAINTY THAT SIN WILL FIND US OUT.

Numb. xxxii. 23. *Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.*

THE fear of punishment, if not the best, is certainly the most common preservative from sin. Under the Mosaic dispensation it was the principal motive with which the divine commands were enforced. Nor did St. Paul, though so well acquainted with the liberal spirit of the Gospel, think it wrong to "persuade men by the terrors of the Lord." The words before us therefore may, not improperly, be addressed to us[a].

[a] The tribes of Reuben and Gad had solicited permission to have the land of Jazer and of Gilead for their portion, instead of any inheritance in the land of Canaan. Upon their promising to fight in conjunction with the other tribes until the whole of Canaan should be subdued, Moses acceded to their proposal; but warned them withal, that, if they receded from their engagement, they should assuredly meet with a due recompence from God.

We may take occasion from them to consider,

I. In what manner we have sinned against the Lord—

It would be endless to attempt an enumeration of all the sins we have committed. We shall confine ourselves to that view of them which the context suggests—

[The sin against which Moses cautioned the two tribes was, unfaithfulness to their engagements, and a preferring of their present ease to the executing of the work which God had assigned them. Now we promised at our baptism to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil[b]. These promises *then* made for us, we have renewed at our confirmation and at the Lord's table: but how have we kept the covenant which we have thus solemnly entered into? Have we not maintained that friendship with the world which is enmity with God[c]? Have we not rather sought to please than to mortify our carnal appetites[d]? Has not the god of this world led us captive at his will[e]? And is not such a life one continued violation of our baptismal engagements?]

But the sin referred to in the text, will scarcely bear any comparison with ours—

[The Israelites were to maintain a warfare with men; we, with the devil[f]. They were to fight for an earthly portion; we, an heavenly[g]. They might have urged that *their* aid was unnecessary, when *God* was engaged; and that, after all, the prize was an inadequate reward for such fatigue and danger. But, can we hope to conquer without exerting our own powers? Do we suppose that God will subdue our enemies without our concurrence? Or can we say that the prize held forth to us is not worth the contest? If our engagements be more solemn, our work more noble, and our reward more glorious than theirs, our sin in disregarding all must be proportionably greater: yet who amongst us must not confess that he has forgotten all his vows? Behold then, we may say to all, "Ye have sinned against the Lord."]

Nor are we to suppose that our sin will always pass unnoticed—

II. What assurance we have that our sin shall find us out—

Sin may be said to find us out when it brings down the divine judgments upon us—

[b] See the Church Catechism.
[c] James iv. 4.
[d] Tit. iii. 3.
[e] Eph. ii. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 26.
[f] Eph. vi. 12.
[g] 1 Cor. ix. 25.

[Conscience, stupified or seared, often forgets to execute its office; nor speaks, till God, by his providence or grace, awaken it. Sometimes years elapse before it reproves our iniquities[h]: sometimes it testifies to our face as soon as our sin is committed[i]. Whenever it thus condemns us, our sins may be said to find us out. But the expression in the text imports rather the visitation of God for sin. There is a punishment annexed to every violation of God's law[k]; and sin then finds us out effectually when it brings that punishment upon us.]

That it will find us out, we have the fullest possible assurance—

[*The perfections of God's nature* absolutely preclude all hope of impunity. If he be omnipresent, he must see; if omniscient, remember; if holy, hate; and if just, punish the violations of his law. If he be possessed of veracity and power, he must execute the judgments he has denounced.

*The declarations of his Word* abundantly confirm this awful truth[l]. Sin leaves a track which can never be effaced; and evil, however slow-paced, will surely overtake it[m]. However scoffers may exult in their security, their ruin is fast approaching[n].

*The remarkable instances* of sin being detected and punished in this world afford a strong additional testimony. David and Gehazi, though so studious to conceal their guilt, had their iniquity marked in the punishment inflicted for it[o]. When, according to human calculations, it was above two millions to one that Achan would escape, the lot fell on him by an infallible direction[p]. How much more then shall the most hidden things be brought to light hereafter!

*The appointment of a day of final retribution* puts the matter beyond a possibility of doubt. For what end can there be such a period fixed, but that the actions of men may be judged? And for what end can they be judged, but that every man may receive according to his deeds[q]? We may then emphatically say to every sinner, "*Be sure your sin*," &c.]

INFER,

1. How earnest should we be in searching out our own sins!

[We think little of evils which have been committed by us

[h] Gen. xlii. 21, 22. [i] Matt. xxvi. 74, 75. and xxvii. 3, 4.
[k] Ezek. xviii. 4. [l] Isai. iii. 11. Rom. ii. 9. Ps. xxi. 8. Prov. xi. 21.
[m] Prov. xiii. 21. Ps. cxl. 11.
[n] 2 Pet. ii. 3. and iii. 4, 9. and Deut. xxix. 19, 20.
[o] 2 Sam. xii. 9—12. 2 Kings v. 26, 27.
[p] Josh. vii. 14—18. [q] Eccl. xii. 14.

long ago, and imagine that they are effaced from God's memory as well as from our own: but every action, word, and thought, is noted in the book of his remembrance. He sees the transactions of former years as if they had this moment passed. All our iniquities are viewed by him in one accumulated mass; nor does he abhor them less than in the very instant they were committed. Let us not then pass them over, or palliate them, as youthful follies. Let us remember how exactly the Lord's threatenings were executed on the Israelites in the wilderness[r]; and endeavour to avert his judgments while space for repentance is allowed us. Let us mourn over our innumerable violations of our baptismal covenant. Let us lament our solicitude about a present portion, our aversion to fight the Lord's battles, and our indifference about the heavenly Canaan. We must repent of these things, or lie under the guilt of them for ever[s].]

2. How thankful should we be that a way of escape is provided for us!

[It is not sin lamented, but sin unrepented of, which will find us out. There is a city of refuge provided for those who will flee to it[t]. The man, Christ Jesus, is an hiding-place from the impending storm[u]. If we flee to him, we may be sure that sin shall NOT find us out. *Every perfection of the Deity* is pledged to save a believing penitent[x]. We are confirmed in this hope by the most *positive declarations of Scripture*[y]. We have most *authentic and astonishing instances* of sin forgiven[z]; and *the day of judgment* is appointed no less for the complete justification of believers than for the condemnation of unbelievers[a]. Let this blessed assurance then dwell richly on our minds. Let it encourage us to take refuge under the Saviour's wings[b]. Let an holy confidence inspire those who have committed their souls to him[c]. And let all rejoice and glory in him as able to save them to the uttermost[d].]

[r] Numb. xxxii. 10—13. [s] Ps. l. 21. Luke xiii. 3.
[t] Heb. vi. 18. [u] Isai. xxxii. 2.
[x] 1 John i. 9. [y] Isai. xliv. 22. Mic. vii. 19. Heb. viii. 12.
[z] 2 Sam. xii. 13. Luke vii. 47. and xxiii. 43. [a] 2 Thess. i. 9, 10.
[b] Matt. xxiii. 37. [c] 2 Tim. i. 12. [d] Heb. vii. 25.

## CLXXXIV.

### THE CITIES OF REFUGE.

Numb. xxxv. 24—28. *The congregation shall judge between the slayer and the revenger of blood, according to these judgments: and the congregation shall deliver the slayer out of*

*the hand of the revenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; and he shall abide in it unto the death of the high-priest, which was anointed with the holy oil. But if the slayer shall at any time come without the border of the city of his refuge, whither he was fled; and the revenger of blood find him without the borders of the city of his refuge, and the revenger of blood kill the slayer, he shall not be guilty of blood; because he should have remained in the city of his refuge until the death of the high-priest: but after the death of the high-priest the slayer shall return into the land of his possession.*

THE impartial administration of justice is one of the richest blessings that result from civilization and good government. It counteracts the evil which might otherwise arise from inequality of rank and fortune, and, without levelling the distinctions which are necessary for the well-being of society, prevents the abuse of them. It keeps every member of the community in his proper place and station: it protects the rich from the rapacity of the envious, and the poor from the oppression of the proud: and, while it imposes on all a salutary restraint, it gives to all personal security and mutual confidence. Supposing therefore that the inspired volume had made no provision for the administration of justice, it would have been expedient to establish such an order of things as should maintain the rights of men inviolate, or inflict condign punishment on the aggressors. But God has graciously admitted this subject into the code which he has given us: he has put honour upon those who are appointed to preside in judgment: he has declared them to be his own representatives and vicegerents upon earth: he has required the utmost deference to be paid them, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake; and has on some occasions ratified their decisions by extraordinary dispensations of his providence[a]. The protecting of the innocent, and the punishing of the guilty, were objects of especial care in the government which he himself established upon earth. This appears, as from a variety of other ordinances, so particularly from the

[a] In the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

appointment of cities of refuge, whither persons, who had accidentally or wilfully taken away the life of a fellow-creature, might flee for safety till the matter should be examined, and the judgment of the congregation declared respecting it.

This enactment, which is to be the subject of the present Discourse, may be considered in a two-fold view; namely, *as a civil ordinance,* and *as a typical institution.*

I. First, let us consider the appointment of cities of refuge *as a civil ordinance:* and for the sake of perspicuity we will begin with explaining the nature and intent of the ordinance, and then make such remarks upon it as our peculiar circumstances require—

The ordinance was simply this. There were to be six cities separated at convenient distances, three on either side of Jordan, that any persons who had occasioned the death of a fellow-creature might flee to one or other of them for safety, till the circumstances of the case should be investigated, and his guilt or innocence be ascertained. The person next of kin to him that was killed, was permitted to avenge the blood of his relation in case he overtook the slayer before he reached the place of refuge; but, when the slayer had got within the gates of the city, he was safe: nevertheless the magistrates were to carry him back to the town or village where the transaction had taken place; and to institute an inquiry into his conduct. Then, if it appeared that he had struck the deceased person in wrath or malice, *(whether with any kind of weapon, or without one,)* he was adjudged to be a murderer, and was delivered up to justice; and the near relative of the murdered person was to be his executioner: if, on the contrary, it was found that he had been unwittingly and unintentionally accessary to the person's death, he was restored to the city whither he had fled, and was protected there from any further apprehensions of the avenger's wrath. Nevertheless he was, as it were, a prisoner at large in that city: he was on no account

to go out of it: if the avenger should at any time find him without the borders of the city, he was at liberty to kill him. This imprisonment continued during the life of the high-priest; but at his death it ceased; and the slayer was at liberty to return to his family and friends. This part of the ordinance was probably intended to put honour upon the high-priest, whose death was to be considered as a public calamity, in the lamenting of which all private resentments were to be swallowed up.

Such was the ordinance itself:—We now come to the intention of it. The shedding of human blood has ever been regarded by God with the utmost abhorrence. The first murderer indeed was spared in consequence of a divine mandate; but not from clemency, but rather, that he might be to the newly-created world a living monument of God's wrath and indignation. The edict given to Noah says expressly, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." But, as there must of course be different degrees of guilt, according to the circumstances under which any person might be killed, God appointed this method of securing protection to the innocent, and punishment to the guilty. The accomplishing of these two objects was, I say, the direct end which the Deity proposed. Provision was thus made that disinterested and experienced judges should have the cause brought before them, and determine it according to evidence: if the man were guilty, and declared to be so on the evidence of *two* witnesses, he must die: whatever were his rank in life, he must die: no commutation of punishment could possibly be admitted. If the man were innocent, or were not convicted by the testimony of *two* witnesses, (for no man was to be put to death on the testimony of *one* witness only,) the whole congregation were bound to secure him from the effects of animosity and vindictive wrath. Yet even in the protection thus afforded to the man-slayer, there were many circumstances which were intended to mark God's abhorrence of murder: for though no blame attached to the man who had

unwittingly slain his neighbour, yet he must leave all that was dear to him, and flee in danger of his life to the city of refuge, and continue there a prisoner, perhaps as long as he lived, and certainly to the death of the high-priest: nor could his confinement there be dispensed with: there was no more commutation of sentence allowed for him, than for the murderer himself. The injunctions of God relative to this deserve particular notice: "Ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death; but he shall be surely put to death. And ye shall take no satisfaction for him that is fled to the city of his refuge; that he should come again and dwell in the land, until the death of the priest. So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for BLOOD DEFILETH THE LAND, AND THE LAND CANNOT BE CLEANSED OF THE BLOOD THAT IS SHED THEREIN, BUT BY THE BLOOD OF HIM THAT SHED IT."

In the remarks that we shall have occasion to make on this ordinance, we must of necessity be more particular than we could wish: but in all that we may say upon this most interesting subject, we beg to be understood, not as presuming to criminate any individual, but as declaring in general terms what we believe to be agreeable to the mind of God, and what we are bound in conscience to declare with all faithfulness.

That there is an ardent wish in all our legislators, and in all who superintend the execution of the laws, to maintain the strictest equity, none can doubt: a conviction of it is rooted in the mind of every Briton; and the bitterest enemies of our country are compelled to acknowledge it. But in some respects there is in our laws an awful departure from the laws of God; I should rather say, a direct opposition to them[b]:

[b] Adultery, by the law of God, was punished with death, with the death of both the offenders: but by our laws the penalties attach only, or principally, when the crime is committed by the wife, and then only on her paramour. That the penalties have on some occasions been heavy, we confess; but never once too heavy. Yet from the nature of the pecuniary mulct, it happens, that the very penalty

I allude to the murders that are committed in duels, and which have greatly, and increasingly, defiled our land. It has been said, and with too much reason, that our laws are sanguinary. They doubtless are so in many instances; but on the subject of duelling, whether from the laws themselves, or from the influence of those who administer them, or from the connivance of those who are sworn to give a verdict according to them, they are criminally lax: and on this account, as well as for the cruelties of the slave-trade, God has a controversy with us. I know that political expediency is urged in support of both these evils: but what have we to do with expediency in express opposition to the commands of God? Let me recall to your minds that declaration of God already cited, that "blood defileth the land, and that the blood that is shed therein cannot be cleansed but by the blood of him that shed it:" and let me turn your attention to another passage, which I would to God that every senator might hear, yea that it might reach the ears of majesty itself, forasmuch as it would reflect no inconsiderable light on the circumstances in which we are involved: you will find it written in 2 Kings xxiv. 2—4. "The Lord sent against him (the king of Judah) bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it .... Surely *at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah,* to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed, (for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood,) *which the Lord would not pardon.*" The Jews probably ascribed the INVASION of their country to the cupidity or anger of the Babylonish monarch: and we also

itself may in some cases contribute to the evil which it is intended to repress; to *repress* I say, rather than to *punish;* for, if public report may be credited, the penalty recently adjudged was expressly said to be, not a punishment inflicted on the offender, but a compensation to the injured party. In this view the crime is never punished as a crime, when no less a punishment than death was by God's law to be awarded to it.

may trace our present dangers to the insatiable ambition of a tyrant: but in our case, as well as theirs, it is certain, that "*at the commandment of the Lord* all this is come upon us:" and the same reason also may be assigned, "Our land is defiled with blood," with the blood of thousands of our fellow-creatures in Africa, and with the blood of murderous duellists in our own land; with "blood (I say) *which the Lord will not pardon.*" Moreover, these iniquities must be considered as sanctioned by the legislature, because they who alone have the power, adopt no measures to cleanse the land from these horrible defilements. God therefore has taken the matter into his own hands, and has stirred up once more our inveterate enemies to avenge his quarrel.[c] The time is come when he is about to "make inquisition for blood," and when he will require at our hands both the innocent blood that we have shed, and the guilty blood which we have forborne to shed. O that we might take warning ere it be too late; and put away the evils which are likely to involve us in utter ruin!

Thus it appears that the ordinance before us is by no means uninstructive, or irrelevant to the present occasion, when God's representatives in judgment are about to investigate causes, and to execute the laws. And we hope that in delivering our sentiments on such momentous concerns we shall not be thought to have exceeded our province, or to have transgressed the rules which modesty, combined with faithfulness, would prescribe.

But we are to consider the appointment of these cities of refuge in another view also; namely,

II. *As a typical institution*—

The whole of the Mosaic economy was "a shadow of good things to come;" and the typical import of it is illustrated at large in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Of course it cannot be expected that every particular part of it should be opened to us with the same precision. What was most essential to the understanding of Christianity, was explained to us

[c] This was an Assize Sermon, preached at Cambridge, July, 1803.

fully, and the parallel drawn by an infallible hand. What was less necessary, was merely referred to, without any express delineation of its import; its signification being clearly to be gathered from the light reflected on other parts, and from the analogy of faith.

There is not much said respecting the typical import of the cities of refuge; yet there are plain and manifest allusions to it. The prophet says, "Turn to your strong hold, ye prisoners of hope;" in which words he marks the precise state of those who had fled to the cities, as "prisoners of hope." St. Paul speaks of Christians as "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before them;" wherein he alludes not only to the cities themselves, but to the care taken to keep the roads leading to them in good repair[d], and by direction-posts to point it out to those, who, if retarded by obstacles, or detained by inquiries, might lose their lives. Again, alluding to the danger of those who should be found out of the borders of the city, he expresses his earnest desire to "be found in Christ." But in explaining images of this kind there is need of much caution and sobriety, lest, while we endeavour to illustrate Scripture, we give occasion to the adversary to regard it as fanciful and absurd. We are however in no danger of exceeding the limits of sober interpretation, if we say that the cities of refuge were intended to teach us three things;—

That we are all obnoxious unto death;

That there is one only way for our escape; and,

That they who flee to the appointed refuge are safe for ever.

That we are all obnoxious unto death, is plain to every one that acknowledges the authority of Scripture. We all are sinners: as sinners, we are condemned by the holy law of God; which says, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." We are therefore in the situation of the man-slayer, pursued by him whose right it is to avenge himself on

[d] Deut. xix. 3.

us for our transgressions. Whether our transgressions have been more or less heinous, his right is the same, and our danger is the same, if we be overtaken by his avenging arm. We may urge many pleas in extenuation of our guilt; but they will be of no avail. We may not have been so bad as others; but we "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God:"—"every mouth therefore must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God." The very calling of Christ by the name, Saviour, is a plain confession, that in ourselves we are lost; for "he came to save only that which was lost."

Further proof of this being unnecessary, we proceed to observe next,

That there is but one way for our escape—

There were many cities in Canaan; but none afforded protection to the man-slayer, except those which had been separated for that express purpose. We too may think that there are many refuges for us; but all, except one, will be found "refuges of lies, which will be swept away with the besom of destruction." Repentances, reformations, alms-deeds, are all good and proper in their place; but none of them, nor all together, can ward off the sword of divine vengeance, or afford security to our souls. Christ is the only refuge: his blood alone can expiate our guilt: "his name is the tower to which we are to run for safety;" "neither is there any other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved." The man-slayer might perchance escape the vigilance of the avenger, or, if overtaken, might successfully withstand him: but who can elude the search of the Almighty, or resist his power? The hope is vain. We must flee to Christ, or perish for ever.

The urgency of the case is methinks a sufficient reason for our fleeing to Christ with all expedition. But if we need any further stimulus, let us reflect on the next hint suggested by the text; namely,

That they who flee to the appointed refuge are safe for ever—

The man-slayer might stand within the gates of

the city, and defy the threats of his adversary: for the whole city were pledged for his security. And may not the sinner, who has taken refuge in Christ, behold without alarm the threatenings of the law, secured as he is by the promise and oath of Jehovah? From the city of refuge indeed they who had committed wilful murder were brought forth for execution. But was ever one cast out who came to Christ? Was ever one taken from that sanctuary in order that he might suffer the sentence of the law? It is possible that through the remissness of the magistrates the rights of those privileged cities might be violated: but who shall violate the engagements of Jehovah? Who shall break in to destroy a sinner lodged in the bosom of his Lord? God himself assures us, that "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

There is however a striking and salutary intimation given us, respecting the necessity not only of fleeing to Christ, but of *abiding in* him. If the man-slayer for one moment ventured beyond the bounds of the city, he lost his privilege, and became exposed to the wrath of the avenger. Thus, if after we have escaped, as we think, from the vengeance of our God, we grow insensible of our guilt and danger, and do not carefully, by renewed applications to the Saviour, abide in him, we expose ourselves to the most imminent peril: for, as "we cannot escape if we neglect so great salvation," so neither can we, "if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth: there will remain nothing for us then but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation to consume us." Our situation will even be worse than ever; and "our latter end be worse than the beginning: for it would have been better never to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us."

Permit me then to address you all as in the situation before described, (for none of us will presume to deny that we are sinners, or that, as sinners, we are obnoxious to the divine displeasure;) and let me

entreat you all to flee from the wrath to come. Let these principles be universally acknowledged amongst us, and deeply rooted in our hearts—That there is no refuge but in Christ—That all self-righteous methods of obtaining mercy will prove fallacious—That every one must feel his guilt and danger, and, like the man-slayer when pursued by the avenger, flee as for his life, renouncing all things whatsoever that may impede his flight and endanger his soul. Pleasures, interests, friends, must all give way to this great concern; and all regard for them must be swallowed up in *this*, the one thing needful. To obtain an interest in Christ must be our great, our only care: we must "count all things but loss that we may win Christ and be found IN him." The city of refuge was open day and night, and to a heathen sojourner as well as to the native Jew: in the same manner also is Christ accessible to us at all times, and his mercy shall be extended to all who flee unto him. The cities of refuge were so situated, that any one at the remotest corner of the land might reach one of them in less than half a day: and is not Jesus also "nigh to all that call upon him?" Yes, all, whether in this land, or in the most distant quarter of the globe, may come to him in one single hour, or, if I may so speak, in one single moment: for the soul that unfeignedly relies on him for pardon and acceptance, is enclosed by him as in an impregnable fortress, and shall be "saved by him with an everlasting salvation." Yet it is not sufficient to flee to him once: we must be daily and hourly fleeing to him in the habit of our minds: in other words, we must "abide in him," by the continual exercise of faith, even to the latest hour of our lives: then shall the death of our great High-Priest be available for our discharge, and we shall be restored to the complete and everlasting enjoyment of our friends, our liberty, and our inheritance.

Hitherto we have enforced the subject from topics suited to all persons in all ages of the world: but we cannot conclude without adding a few considerations,

which arise out of existing circumstances, and are peculiarly worthy of our attention. That our enemies are Jehovah's sword, and that he is come forth against us as an avenger, cannot but be confessed: but whether it be for our chastisement only, or for our utter destruction, none can tell. One thing however is sure; that the best possible method of pacifying the divine anger, and averting the impending judgments, is, to flee unto the Saviour, and to seek mercy through him. If once we were stirred up, as a nation, to take refuge in him, He who spared repenting Nineveh, would spare us, and either avert the gathering storm, or deliver us from its dreadful ravages. This is the direction uniformly given us by God himself. Thus he says by the prophet Zephaniah, "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger." Again he says by Isaiah, "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee; hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast: for, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the land for their iniquity." Could we but be prevailed upon to follow this advice, we doubt not but that it would be more effectual for our preservation than all the navies that can be built, or all the armies that can be mustered: for if God were for us, none could successfully fight against us. If we were even already vanquished, yea, and led into captivity, still we "should take those captive whose captives we were, and should rule over our oppressors." Let me not however be understood as disregarding the proper means of self-defence: for God saves by means; and to expect his interposition without using our utmost efforts in our own behalf, would be presumption.—Though therefore we would

exhort all in the first place to flee for refuge to the hope set before them, we would also exhort them to stand forth manfully against the enemy; to regard neither time, nor labour, nor property, no, nor life itself, so that they may but help forward to the uttermost their country's cause. And though the occupation of a warrior is the last perhaps that a man of piety would choose, yet on the present occasion conscience requires, rather than forbids, that all of us should unite with heart and hand to repel the foe, and to sacrifice our lives, if need be, in defence of our religion and liberties, our property and friends, our king and country. Still however we must recur to our former observation; and urge in the first place the necessity of turning to our strong-hold. Would to God that none of us might delay, or loiter, or slacken our pace, or yield to weariness, or regard any thing that we leave behind; but that all might flee, as Lot out of Sodom, to our adorable Saviour! Then, whether we live or die, we must be safe. The enemy may destroy our bodies, but our great adversary can never hurt our souls. Our immortal part will be placed beyond the reach of harm: and when empires fall, yea, and the whole earth shall be dissolved by fire, we shall dwell in mansions that are inaccessible to evil, and enjoy a bliss that shall never end.

# DEUTERONOMY.

## CLXXXV.

### THE PROSPERITY OF ZION DESIRED.

Deut. i. 11. *The Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you!*

TO decline any measure of exertion in behalf of persons committed to our care, may appear to argue a want of love to them. But there are certain bounds beyond which a man cannot go: his physical strength will fail; and his attempts to persevere beyond his capacity of performance will defeat the very object he has in view, and prove an injury to the persons whose welfare he is labouring to consult. The care of all the people of Israel, two millions in number, had devolved on Moses: and he endeavoured, as their chief magistrate, to dispense justice to them all, by hearing and determining every subject of litigation that was brought before him. This occupied him from morning to night, and was obviously impairing his bodily health: the labour was too great for him; and he would soon have sunk under it. By the advice of Jethro, his father-in-law, he appointed persons, chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to hear all the causes which were of inferior moment, and reserved to himself the determination of those only which were of a more difficult nature, and which required a more especial reference to God himself. He was now arrived at the borders of Jordan, and at the last month of his life: and was directed of God to record, and leave behind him in writing, a brief memorial of the principal events which had taken place, and the principal laws which had been promulgated, during their sojourning in the wilderness: that so the

generation which had arisen in the wilderness might, by a special recapitulation of those events, have them the more deeply impressed on their minds, and be stirred up by the remembrance of them to serve their God with more fidelity than their fathers had done. The appointment of these inferior judges was one of the first acts which took place in the wilderness: and, as it originated from Jethro, his father-in-law, and not from God, Moses was fearful that it might be open to an unfavourable construction, and that he might appear, if not to have neglected his duty towards the people, at least to have been defective in love towards them: and therefore, in relating the fact, he tells them how anxiously he had at the very time manifested his zeal in their service; since, whilst issuing his order for the appointment of these men, instead of grudging that they were so numerous as to render the minute attention which he had hitherto paid to their concerns impracticable, he had expressed the most ardent desire for their further increase, saying, "The Lord God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as he hath promised you!"

This benevolent wish of his will lead me to consider the prosperity of God's Israel,

I. As a matter of promise—

To the promises of God relating to this subject Moses refers: "The Lord bless you, *as he has promised you!*"

Now God has promised innumerable blessings to those who are of Israel according to the flesh—

[He had assured Abraham that his seed should be numerous "as the stars of heaven, and countless as the sands upon the sea-shore[a]." They had already multiplied greatly; (they were about thirty thousand times as many as they had been two hundred and fifty years before:) and they should yet multiply to a far greater extent, as they did in succeeding ages; and as they shall do in ages yet to come: for though at present they are brought low and are very few in number, God has expressly declared, by his prophet, that "he will multiply them

[a] Gen. xv. 5.

above their fathers[b]." His blessings, too, shall be richly poured out upon them, not only as they were in Canaan, in the days of David and Solomon, but in a measure that can scarcely be conceived. Even in a temporal view, I apprehend, the magnificent descriptions of the prophets will be realized[c]; but in a spiritual view I am perfectly sure of it: for they shall be restored to their God, and be as great monuments of God's love and mercy in the world, as ever they have been of his wrath and indignation[d]: yes, the time is now fast approaching, when "he will multiply them, that they shall not be few; and glorify them, that they shall not be small[e]:" and when "they shall sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout among the chief of the nations, saying one to another, Publish ye, praise ye, and say, Save thy people, the remnant of Israel[f]."]

Innumerable blessings, too, has God promised to his spiritual Israel—

[That these are included in the wish of Moses, there can be no doubt: for, in the promise which he more immediately refers to, where it is said, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore;" it is added, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed[g]." Here, beyond all doubt, is reference to the whole Gentile world, who shall in due season be converted to the Lord, and together with Israel become "one fold under one Shepherd." That these were included in the promise made to Abraham, St. Paul expressly declares: "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify *the Heathen* through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall *all nations* be blessed. So, then, they which be of faith" *(whether Jews or Gentiles, the same* (are the children of Abraham, and) "are blessed with faithful Abraham[h]." He further declares, that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, *that the blessing of Abraham* might come on *the Gentiles* through Jesus Christ, that *we* might receive *the promise of the Spirit* through faith[i]." Here, then, we have a fuller insight into the wish of Moses, as expressed in the text; a wish in which every pious person under heaven must concur.]

Let us then consider the prosperity of Israel,

II. As an object of desire—

"O that the Lord God of our fathers would mul-

[b] Jer. xxxiii. 22. Deut. xxx. 5.
[c] Amos ix. 11—15. Zech. viii. 3—8. [d] Zech. viii. 13, 18—23.
[e] Jer. xxx. 19. [f] Jer. xxxi. 7.
[g] Gen. xxii. 17, 18. [h] Gal. iii. 7—9. [i] Gal. iii. 13, 14.

tiply his people a thousand-fold, and bless them, as he has promised them!" If any of you need a stimulus to concur in this wish, reflect on,

1. The benefit that will accrue to every converted soul—

[Were we to contemplate a soul actually taken out of hell, and translated to a throne of glory in heaven, we should say, indeed, that such an one had reason to rejoice. Yet, what is it less than this that is done for every child of God? Are we not doomed to perdition? Is there any child of man that is not "by nature a child of wrath[k]?" Consequently, if delivered from condemnation, "is he not a brand plucked out of the fire[l]?" Is he not, at the very time that he is "turned from darkness to light, turned also from the power of Satan unto God[m]?" Does he not actually "pass from death unto life[n]?" and is he not "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son[o]?" Reflect then on this, as done for only one soul; and there is reason, abundant reason, for every benevolent person in the universe to pant for it. But consider it as extended to thousands, and millions, yea, millions of millions, even the whole human race, and who should not pant and pray for that? See what a commotion is produced in heaven even by the conversion of one soul: for "there is joy among the angels, in the very presence of God, over one sinner that repenteth:" and what must we be, who feel so indifferent about the conversion and salvation of the whole world? Verily, we have need to blush and be confounded before God, for the coldness with which we contemplate his promised blessings.]

2. The honour that will redound to God—

[Behold our fallen race! Who is there amongst them that bears any measure of resemblance to the image in which man was first created? Who regards God? Who does not practically "say to God, Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thy ways[p]?" But let a soul be apprehended by divine grace, and converted to the faith of Christ, and what a different aspect does he then bear! Verily, the whole works of creation do not so brightly exhibit the glory of God, as does this new-created being. Brilliant as are the rays of the noonday sun, they do not display even the natural perfections, and still less the moral perfections, of the Deity, as he; who, from the image of "his father, the devil," is "transformed into the image of God himself, in righteousness and true holiness."

[k] Eph. ii. 3. [l] Zech. iii. 2. [m] Acts xxvi. 18.
[n] 1 John iii. 14. [o] Col. i. 13. [p] Job xxi. 14.

Now, too, he begins to live unto his God, and by every possible means to exalt his glory in the world, acknowledging him in all things, serving him in all things, glorifying him in all things. Is there a man that is in any respect sensible of his obligations to God, and not desirous that such converts should be multiplied? Did David "shed rivers of tears for those who kept not God's law;" and shall not we weep and pray that such persons may be converted to God, and made monuments of his saving grace? But conceive of this whole world, that is in rebellion against God, converted thus, and God's will done on earth as it is done in heaven: and shall *this* be to us no object of desire? Verily, we should take no rest to ourselves, nor give any rest to God, till he accomplish this blessed work[q], and till "all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of his Christ[r]."]

3. The happiness that will arise to the whole world—

[Every soul that is converted to God becomes "a light" to those around him; and as "salt," to keep, as it were, from utter putrefaction the neighbourhood in which he dwells. In proportion, then, as these are multiplied, the very world itself assumes a different aspect; instead of the brier there grows up the fir-tree, and "instead of the thorn there grows up the myrtle-tree;" till, at last, "the whole wilderness shall blossom as the rose," and this "desert become as the garden of the Lord." I need not say more. The wish of Moses is, methinks, the wish of every one amongst you; and you are all saying with David, "Blessed be God's glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory: Amen and Amen[s]."]

You will ASK, then, What shall we do to accelerate this glorious event?

[God works by means. He did so in the apostolic age: and he will do so still: and if we have any love either for God or man, we should use all the means within our power for the increase of the Church and the salvation of the world. Yet may we learn a very important lesson from the conduct of Moses, in the appointment of persons to labour with him. He had sustained the burthen, himself alone, and doubtless thought that he was rendering an acceptable service both to God and man. But his father-in-law said to him, and said with truth, "The thing that thou doest is not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and the people that is with

[q] Isai. lxii. 6, 7. [r] Rev. ii. 15. [s] Ps. lxxii. 19.

thee: for this thing is too heavy for thee: thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. Hearken now unto my voice: I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee." And then he proceeds to advise, that he should provide, out of all the people, a number of pious and able men to co-operate with him in the work wherein he was engaged[t]. And Moses did well in following the advice: for if he had not, his indiscreet zeal would have soon worn him out, and deprived the whole nation of the benefit of his labours for forty years. It were well if pious ministers would attend to this hint. There is scarcely a man who has any zeal for God or love for souls, who does not so multiply his labours, as to reduce his strength in a few months or years; when true wisdom would teach him so to regulate his exertions, that he may hope to continue them unimpaired to nearly the end of life. I mean not by this to *damp* the zeal of ministers, but only to *direct* it. It is impossible to be too zealous for the Lord: but it is possible enough, and too common also, to exercise zeal in so indiscreet a way, as greatly to injure the Church which we profess to serve. Let the zeal of our people be called forth: let them be invited to labour with us, to visit the sick, to instruct the rising generation, and to engage in every thing which may benefit our fellow-creatures and exalt the honour of our God. With all the aid that can be afforded us, there will be work enough for us to do: and we should endeavour to perform our duties with spirituality and effect, rather than to abound in mere bodily exercise, which, after all, will profit but little for the salvation of souls. Are there then, amongst you, any that know the value of your own souls? I call on you to help your minister in all those parts of his office which you can with propriety perform. And I trust, that if we will all exert ourselves according to our several abilities, the work of God will rapidly advance amongst us, and our "Jerusalem soon become a praise in the earth." When all, both male and female, concurred in rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, every one working before his own door, the whole was completed in the incredibly short space of two-and-fifty days[u]. And what effects should not we see, if all were unanimous and earnest in advancing, each according to his ability, the work of God amongst us? Methinks, our numbers would be greatly multiplied, and "showers of blessings" would be poured out amongst us.]

[t] Exod. xviii. 17—23.
[u] Neh. ii. 12, 28. and iii. 6. and vi. 15, 16.

## CLXXXVI.

### VICTORY ASSURED TO THE TRUE ISRAEL.

Deut. i. 21. *Behold, the Lord thy God hath set the land before thee: go up, and possess it, as the Lord thy God hath said unto thee: fear not, neither be discouraged.*

THE journeyings of the Israelites in the wilderness afford an inexhaustible fund of instruction to us. The history of their deliverance from Egypt, their trials and supports, and their final entrance into the land of Canaan, so exactly corresponds with the experience of believers in their journey heaven-ward, that we are never at a loss for an illustration of that which is invisible, from that which actually took place amongst God's ancient people.

The Israelites, after one year spent in the wilderness, were now arrived on the very confines of Canaan: and the exhortation which I have now read to you, was part of the address of Moses to them, encouraging them to go up and take possession of the land. And, assuming (what I need not now stand to prove) the justness of the parallel between their state and ours, the words before us contain,

I. The command given us in reference to the promised land—

There is for us, as there was for Israel, "a rest" prepared[a]. And we are here bidden to take possession of it,

1. By right, as the gift of God—

[Canaan was *given* to Abraham and his seed by God himself: and the grant was confirmed with an oath, that the possession of it should infallibly be secured to them[b]. God had a right to bestow it upon whomsoever he would: and they to whom he should assign it had a perfect right to occupy it. The former possessors were no more than tenants at will: and, if God saw fit to dispossess them, and to let it out to other husbandmen, no injury was done to them, either on the part of the Great Proprietor, or on the part of those whom he appointed to succeed to the inheritance. This I say, in order to satisfy the minds of those who, through ignorance of the

[a] Heb. iv. 8, 9. This passage sufficiently proves the parallel that is here assumed. [b] ver. 8.

tenure on which the land was held, feel a repugnance to the transfer, and to the mode in which the transfer of the land was effected.

In relation, however, to the land which *we* are called to possess, no such feeling can exist. Heaven is the free gift of God to Abraham's *spiritual* seed, as Canaan was to his *natural* descendants. It is given to them in Christ Jesus: yea, it was given to them even before the worlds were made[c]. And, as a person receiving a grant of land from an earthly monarch would go up without hesitation to take possession of it, so should every person who believes in Christ regard the heavenly land, and go up, *not to make it* his own, but to take possession of it as his own. No thought of purchasing it must for one moment enter into his mind. If he is united unto Christ by faith, *that* is a sufficient title; and from that moment he may claim it as his own.

This command then do we give, in the name of Almighty God, to every one of you who believes in Christ; "Go up and possess the land," which the Sovereign of the universe, of his own love and mercy, has given to you.]

2. By conflict, as the fruit of victory—

[Though the land was given them, yet were they to gain it by the sword. And we also have enemies without number to encounter. The world, the flesh, and the devil, all obstruct our way; and must be vanquished, before we can sit down in the full enjoyment of the promised inheritance — — — Nor let it be thought that heaven is the less a gift on this account: for though we fight, it is not our own sword that gets us the victory. It was "God himself who drove out the inhabitants" of the earthly Canaan: and it is through God alone that our weapons produce any effect in subduing our enemies before us[d]. How compatible the two are, will appear from what our blessed Lord has said: "*Labour* not for the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man will *give* unto you[e]." You must fight; and you must conquer: but, after all, you must say, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise[f]."]

Together with this command, we are taught,

II. The way in which we should address ourselves to the performance of it—

The command of God to us is positive, as that to them also was: and,

1. Our obedience to him should be prompt—

[I am persuaded they would have done well, if they had

[c] Tit. i. 2. and 2 Tim. i. 9.
[d] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5.
[e] John vi. 27.
[f] Ps. cxv. 1.

never thought of sending spies to search out the land, and to tell them against what cities they should direct their first efforts. It was a carnal expedient, as the event proved. True it is, that "Moses was well pleased" with the proposal[g]: but he would not have been well pleased, if he had clearly seen from whence it issued, and what would be the result of it. He conceived it to be expressive only of a determination to go up, the very instant they should be directed where to go. And, supposing that there was no mixture of unbelief in it, it might be laudable enough. But what need had they of *men* to "search out the land," and to direct their efforts? Had not Almighty God himself, for the space of a whole year, "gone before them *to search out* places from day to day where they should fix their tents[h]?" Had he done this "by a pillar of fire by night, and by a cloud by day," and was he not both able and willing to shew them "by which way to go up" to the land, and what cities to attack? I say again, it was a carnal expedient, as the event proved: and it was the source of all the calamities that they endured for the space of forty years. Had they said to Moses, 'Pray to *God* for us, to direct us; and we are ready to go;' they would have done well: but, by trusting to an arm of flesh, they fell.

In like manner, we should obey the divine mandate without delay. We should "not confer with flesh and blood[l]:" we should not be consulting how we may avoid the trials which God has taught us to expect; but should look simply to the Captain of our salvation, and follow implicitly his commands; regarding no word in comparison of his, nor ever dreaming of a more convenient season than the present. What He calls us to do, we should "do" instantly, and "with all our might."]

2. Our confidence in him should be entire—

[They were bidden "not to fear, or be discouraged." So neither should we "fear" any dangers that may threaten us, or "be discouraged" under any trials we may be called to sustain. As for "Anakims," or cities "walled up to heaven," what are they to us? Is not "He greater, that is in us, than any that can be in them?" If Jehovah be on our side, what have we to fear? We may say of all our enemies, as Joshua did of those he was called to encounter, "They are bread for us[k];" and shall not only be devoured as easily as a morsel of bread, but they, and all that they have, shall be our very support, invigorating our souls by the energies they call forth, and augmenting the happiness which they labour to destroy. Whatever may occur, we should never stagger at the promise through unbelief; but "be strong in faith, giving glory to God[l]." We should go

[g] ver. 23. [h] ver. 33. [l] Gal. i. 16.
[k] Numb. xiv. 8, 9. [l] Rom. iv. 20.

forward in the spirit of the holy Apostle, "If God be for us, who can be against us[m]?"

Hear then, believers, and follow my ADVICE—

1. Survey the land—

[See whether it be not *the glory of all lands*, "a land flowing with milk and honey." Come up to Pisgah, and look down upon it: or rather, I would say, Come up to Zion, and behold its length and breadth. See already, and taste, the fruits of it. Take into your hands "the grapes of Eshcol," and tell me whether the whole world besides affords such fruit. Methinks, some of you at least have already partaken of them: yes, I doubt not, but that, in "the light of God's countenance lifted up upon you," and in "his love shed abroad in your hearts," you have already found an earnest and a foretaste of your heavenly inheritance. But still, I say, Survey the land. "Not one of its inhabitants ever says, I am sick[n]." "No sorrow is there, no sighing, no pain, no death[o]." "Nor is there any night there: it needs neither the sun nor moon to lighten it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof[p]."

Tell me, then, is it not worth the conflict? Is any thing too much to do, or too severe to suffer, in order to obtain it[q]? Only keep that glorious object in view, and you will never sheathe your sword, till you have gained the victory.]

2. Perform your duty—

[Gird on your swords. Go forward against the enemy. Make no account of any obstacles. Think neither of the strength or number of your enemies. Say not, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive delivered? for thus saith the Lord; The prey of the mighty *shall* be taken away; and the lawful captive *shall* be delivered: for *I* will contend with him that contendeth with thee; and *I* will save thy children[r]." Neither be discouraged from a sense of your own weakness: for "God will perfect his own strength in your weakness[s]." Go on simply depending on your God. Rest on that word of his, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee: yea, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness[t]." With confidence do I address you thus: for the Lord Jesus Christ himself has said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom[u]." Only "fight the good fight of faith:" and you shall be "more than conquerors, through Him that loved you."]

[m] Rom. viii. 31. [n] Isai. xxxiii. 24. [o] Rev. xxi. 4.
[p] Rev. xxi. 23. [q] Rom. viii. 18. [r] Isai. xlix. 24, 25.
[s] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. [t] Isai. xli. 10. [u] Luke xii. 32.

## CLXXXVII.

### GOD'S CONTINUED MERCIES TO US.

Deut. ii. 7. *These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee: thou hast lacked nothing.*

WHOEVER would enter fully into the doctrine of a divine providence, should study the history of the Israelites in the wilderness. We at this day are ready to imagine, that, however God may superintend the affairs of the universe sufficiently to keep them in order, and to subserve his own purposes, he yet leaves minuter matters to a kind of chance; and that to expect his interposition in our own behalf, especially in things of daily occurrence, would be the height of presumption. In a word, we draw lines of distinction between a general and a particular providence; and feel ourselves at liberty to acknowledge the one, whilst we deny the other. But in the Scriptures there will not, I apprehend, be found any ground for such a distinction. We cannot conceive any thing of less moment than a sparrow falling to the ground, or an hair of our head perishing; yet these things are expressly declared to be within the bounds of God's peculiar care. The truth is, that God is the same as ever he was; and that his attention to the affairs of men is still the same: the only difference is, that for special ends he made his interpositions visible in former days; whereas, now he would have us to "walk by faith, and not by sight." Of his people in the wilderness, he was the visible Leader, Protector, Nourisher: and so constant had been his attention to their every want, that, at the close of their pilgrimage, Moses could appeal to the whole nation, "These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee: thou hast lacked nothing."

That we may see that his care has not been exclusively confined to them, I will shew,

I. What mercies have been vouchsafed to us during the whole period of our sojourning in this wilderness—

Surprising, indeed, was his attention to his ancient

people. They were in a wilderness where there was literally nothing for their sustenance. Neither bread nor water could be found there: but of both did God afford them a daily and miraculous supply; causing bread to descend from heaven for them, and the waters of the rock to follow them. But from whence should they obtain raiment? None could be fabricated; none be found. But God superseded the need of any fresh supply, by causing that "their clothes, for the whole space of forty years, should never decay;" and that, notwithstanding all their travelling, "their shoe should never wax old upon their foot[a]." Nor would he suffer their strength to fail: for, "as their raiment waxed not old upon them, so neither did their foot swell for forty years[b]." With these corporeal blessings, God imparted to them no less richly for their souls. He gave them his word; he continued to them his ministers; "he sent to them, also, his Holy Spirit to instruct them[c]."

Now in all this we may see what God, in his mercy, has done for us also, during the whole of our sojourning in this wilderness:

1. In relation to temporal concerns—

[*Us*, also, has God supplied with all the necessaries of life: but because, in providing these things, the agency of man is required, we overlook His hand; whereas, in fact, he is as much the author and giver of these blessings to us, as he was of the mercies vouchsafed to Israel. What can we do to secure fruitful seasons? Who amongst us could make so much as a blade of grass to grow? Who could prevent the fruits of the earth from being devoured by locusts and caterpillars, or from being destroyed by blasting and mildew? Who has kept from our borders the desolating scourge of war? Who has preserved us from the more terrific calamities of civil war? To whom are we indebted, that we have not been reduced to the lowest ebb of misery by some destructive conflagration? Men, it is true, are actively employed in providing for themselves: but what are men? they are nothing but agents, (unconscious agents, I had almost said,) accomplishing the will of another: for, whilst they are universally seeking their own personal advantage, they are, in reality, God's instruments, employed by him for the benefit of the world. We see this

[a] Deut. xxix. 5. [b] Deut. viii. 4. [c] Neh. ix. 20.

exemplified in the labours of bees; from which we may form a just idea of all that is passing in the world. Thousands of persons are employed, daily and hourly, to supply our wants. Little do we think of this. Were we placed for any length of time in a country uninhabited except by ourselves and our own domestic circle, we should soon feel how deeply we are indebted to God for innumerable comforts, which, through his good providence, we enjoy; and which, through a stimulus imparted by him, other persons are engaged in procuring for us. What their motives may be, is no concern of ours: it is sufficient for us to know, that, as God directed and overruled the ambition of Sennacherib to correct and chasten his people Israel[d], so he directs and overrules the selfish dispositions of mankind to administer to the wants of each other, and to provide for the comfort of the whole world. And the poorest person amongst us has thousands of persons at this very time engaged for him, to provide him with the comforts and conveniences of life.]

2. In relation to the concerns of our souls—

[Has not God preserved to *us*, also, his word and ordinances; dispensed, too, by the same ministry for forty years[e]? and may we not say, too, that God has, during the whole of that period, "sent his good Spirit to instruct you?" Yes; God has borne testimony to the word of his grace, and caused it to "come to you not in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance[f]." I would not willingly speak of any thing relating to myself: *that* is the last subject that should ever be brought before you: but, having fulfilled the term that Moses and Aaron did before me; and being able to call to witness, that, during the whole of that time, I have lived for you, and laboured for you, and "declared unto you faithfully the whole counsel of God;" I cannot but remind you of God's dealings with you in that particular, and make my appeal to you in the words of my text, "These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; ye have lacked nothing[g]."]

Whatever be the value of these mercies, it will be greatly heightened by considering,

[d] Isai. x. 5—7.

[e] In the year 1822, the Author had ministered at Trinity Church the precise time that Moses and Aaron had to Israel.

[f] 1 Thess. i. 5.

[g] The example of St. Paul, in his address to the Elders of Ephesus (Acts xx. 17—27, 31.) must be the Author's apology for the foregoing observations; which, after forty years of labour in the same church, may well be allowed.

II. Under what circumstances they have been continued to us—

If we look at Israel, they will serve as a mirror, to reflect our image to the very life. In them we may see,

1. How great our provocations have been—

[Grievously neglectful of their duties were the Israelites, during the whole of their sojourning in the wilderness. Though commanded to circumcise their children, they never administered that rite in all that time[h]. Never but once had they held a Passover; and that was in the very first year after they had come out of Egypt[i]. And during the whole forty years they offered no sacrifice to God; but, on the contrary, paid their devotions to senseless gods, and graven images[k]. Such was their conduct in the wilderness. And what has been ours? Have not our most solemn duties been neglected, or performed only in such a way as to shew that our heart was not in them? Have we attained the true circumcision, even "the circumcision of the heart, which is not in the flesh, but in the Spirit; whose praise is not of men, but of God[l]?" Have we fed upon the Paschal Lamb, even on "Christ our Passover, who has been sacrificed for us[m]?" Have "we presented ourselves as living sacrifices to God, which has been our reasonable service[n]?" Have we not rather "set up idols in our hearts[o]," even every heathenish abomination, and in ten thousand instances "loved and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore[p]?" And do we "find these things by secret search[q]?" No: your whole lives proclaim it. Must we go back to the Apostles' days to find that "covetousness which is idolatry," or the people "whose god is their belly," and who have no delight in any thing but the gratification of their sensual appetites? Let us look back through the whole time of our sojourning in this wilderness, and we shall find our whole lives to have been one continued series of provocations; as if we had determined to "weary out our God[r]," and "break down his very Spirit with our whorish heart[s]." Yes; "this has been our manner from our youth[t]." God "has known this to be our walking through this great wilderness:" and our consciences also attest that these accusations are true.]

2. How entirely we have been under the influence of unbelief—

[h] Josh. v. 5—7. [i] Numb. ix. 5. [k] Acts vii. 41—43.
[l] Rom. ii. 29. [m] 1 Cor. v. 7. [n] Rom. xii. 1.
[o] Ezek. xiv. 3. [p] Rom. i. 25. [q] Jer. ii. 34.
[r] Isai. xliii. 24. [s] Ezek. vi. 9. [t] Jer. xxii. 21.

[Notwithstanding all that God did for Israel, yet would they "never believe his word[u]." And it was this very thing which most of all provoked him to "swear, that they should never enter into his rest[x]." And what has been our state in this respect? We have had God's promises and threatenings set before us with all fidelity: but neither the one nor the other have been regarded: they have all appeared to us but as idle tales; and have had no more influence upon us, than if they had been unworthy of the smallest credit. Every earthly vanity has been able to excite a hope or fear: but God's word has been altogether despised. Say, Brethren, whether this be not true? Say whether the terrors of hell have been sufficient to keep you from sin, or the glories of heaven sufficient to stimulate you to a surrender of yourselves to God? With the exception of a few instances, wherein divine grace has wrought successfully upon this or that particular individual, the whole mass of us have lived as "without God in the world," preferring our own will before his, and the gratification of ourselves before the honour of our God.

Such have been the circumstances under which our God has continued to load us with his benefits. "We have lacked nothing" that was conducive to our comfort: but he has lacked every thing that should promote his glory.]

SEE then, here—

1. What reason we have to admire the patience of our God—

[He complains that he has been "pressed under us, even as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves[y]:" yet has he borne with us even to the present hour; "many a time turning his anger away, and not stirring up all his wrath," to punish us, as we deserved[z]. Can you look back upon no season, Brethren, when God might well have cut you off; and have "got honour to himself" in executing upon you the most signal vengeance[a]? I call upon you, then, to glorify his name; and to acknowledge from your inmost souls, that "it is of his mercies that you have not been long since consumed, even because his compassions fail not[b]."]

2. What need we have to humble ourselves before him—

[God's patience will come to an end. "His Spirit will not always strive with man[c]." He waits to be gracious unto us; but it is to the penitent only that he will impart the full

[u] Ps. lxxviii. 22, 32. and cvi. 24. [x] Heb. iii. 18.
[y] Amos ii. 13. [z] Ps. lxxviii. 38. [a] Exod. xiv. 17.
[b] Lam. iii. 22. [c] Gen. vi. 3.

blessings of salvation. His determination is, "Whoso covereth his sins, shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth, and forsaketh them, shall have mercy." Contend, then, with him no longer; but let "his goodness and long-suffering and forbearance lead you to repentance[d]."]

3. What need professors of religion, in particular, have to fear and tremble—

[The whole people of Israel had been brought out of Egypt, and been both blessed and honoured by God as his peculiar people: and yet they perished in the wilderness. And this is recorded as an admonition to us[e]. St. Jude, also, particularly labours to impress this warning on our minds[f]. Let it sink, then, into all our hearts[g]: for the very bounty of our God, in the bestowment of temporal and spiritual blessings upon us, will only aggravate our condemnation, if we do not make a suitable improvement of them. We may have "lacked nothing for forty years," and yet "lack a drop of water" to all eternity. I pray you, Brethren, see to it, that your "hearts be right with God;" and that the blessings bestowed on you in this life, be the means of preparing you for richer blessings in the world to come.]

[d] Rom. ii. 4.
[e] 1 Cor. x. 1—12.
[f] Jude, ver. 5.
[g] Heb. iii. 12. and iv. 1.

## CLXXXVIII.

### MOSES VIEWS CANAAN FROM PISGAH.

Deut. iii. 23—28. *And I besought the Lord at that time, saying, O Lord God, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain and Lebanon! But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.*

THE character of Moses, in whatever point of view it be considered, is worthy of admiration: his zeal and industry, his patience and meekness, his fidelity

and love, were never surpassed by any child of man. As an intercessor for the Lord's people, he stands unrivalled. Many were the occasions whereon he prevailed on God to spare that rebellious nation that had been committed to his charge. But behold, this eminent saint, who had so often succeeded in his applications for others, was now refused when praying for himself. And, though it might appear humiliating, and might lower him in the estimation of all future generations, he gives a faithful account of the whole matter, recording both the prayer that he offered, and the answer he received.

The points to which we would call your attention, are,

I. God's rejection of the prayer of Moses—

Nothing could be more proper than this prayer of Moses—

[He requested that he might be permitted to "go over Jordan, and see the promised land." It was with a view to the enjoyment of this land that he had laboured incessantly for forty years. He had held up the possession of it as the great inducement to the whole nation to come forth from Egypt, and to endure all the hardships of journeying in the wilderness, and the perils of protracted warfare against the inhabitants of the land. He knew that Canaan was "the glory of all lands." And now that the period for the full possession of it was arrived, yea, and God had given them an earnest of it in the subjugation of the kingdoms on the east of Jordan, who can wonder that Moses should be anxious to participate the promised happiness? *The manner in which he sought it* was most becoming. He did not complain of the sentence of exclusion that had been passed upon him; but only prayed that it might be reversed. Often had he urged similar petitions for others with success: and therefore he had reason to hope, that he might not plead in vain for himself. He did not certainly know that God's decree with respect to him differed from the threatenings that had been denounced against others: there might be a secret reserve of mercy in the one case as well as in the other: and therefore he was emboldened to offer his requests, but with a meekness and modesty peculiarly suited to the occasion.]

But God saw fit to reject his petition—

[The refusal which God gave him on this occasion was most peremptory. When he had rejected his prayer for the offending nation, he said, "Let me alone;" and in that very expression

intimated the irresistible efficacy of prayer. But on this occasion he forbade him to "speak to him any more of that matter:" yea, he "*sware* to Moses, that he should not go over Jordan[a]." In this refusal there was an awful manifestation of the divine displeasure. It was intended as a punishment both for his sin, and for the people's sin; for God was "wroth with him for *their* sakes," as well as for his own. To *him* the punishment was great, as being a painful privation, a heavy disappointment: to *them* also it was a severe rebuke, inasmuch as they were deprived of a loving father, a powerful intercessor, an experienced governor, and under whom they had succeeded hitherto beyond their most sanguine expectations.

We forbear to notice the *typical* intent of this dispensation, because we have mentioned it in a former part of this history[b]: it is in a *practical* aspect only that we now consider it; and therefore we confine ourselves to such observations as arise from it in that view.]

This refusal however, though absolute, was not unmixed with kindness: as will appear from considering,

II. The mercy with which this judgment was tempered—

As God in later ages withheld from Paul, and even from his only dear Son, the blessings which they asked, but gave them what was more expedient under their circumstances[c], so now, whilst he denied to Moses an entrance into Canaan, he granted to him,

1. A sight of the whole land—

[He commanded Moses to go up on Mount Pisgah to view the land; and from that eminence he shewed him the whole extent of the country from east to west, and from north to south. The sight, we apprehend, was miraculous: because, however great the elevation of the mountain might be, we do not conceive that the places which he saw could be within the visible horizon[d]. However this might be, we have no doubt but that the sight must have been most gratifying to his mind, because it would be regarded as a pledge of God's fidelity, and a taste at least of those blessings, which Israel was about to enjoy in all their fulness.

But we are persuaded that Moses, notwithstanding he spoke so little about the heavenly world, knew the typical nature of

[a] Deut. iv. 21. [b] See Discourse on Numb. xx. 12.
[c] 2 Cor. xii. 8, 9. Luke xxii. 42, 43. with Heb. v. 7.
[d] Deut. xxxiv. 1—4.

the promised land, and beheld in Canaan a figurative representation of that better kingdom, to which he was about to be translated.]

2. An assurance that his place should be successfully filled by Joshua—

[To him was committed the office of instructing, encouraging, and strengthening Joshua for the arduous work which lay before him. And what could be a richer comfort to an aged minister, than to see that God had already raised up one to occupy his post, and to carry on the work which he had begun? Methinks, the preparing of Joshua's mind for his high office was a task in which Moses would take peculiar delight: and the certainty of Israel's ultimate success would cheer him under the pains of his own personal disappointment.]

The PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS arising out of this history, will bring the subject home to our own business and bosoms. We learn from it,

1. To guard against sin—

[We might profitably dwell on this thought, if we considered only the exclusion of Moses from the promised land for one single transgression. But as other occasions must arise whereon such an observation may be grounded, we would call your attention rather to the injury which both ministers and people may sustain by means of each other's transgressions. Repeatedly does Moses say, "God was wroth with me FOR YOUR SAKES:" from whence we are assured, that *their* sins were punished in *him*. And we know also that *his* sin was punished in *them:* they suffered no less by the loss of him, than he did by the loss of Canaan. Such a participation in each other's crimes and punishments is common in the world: children are affected by their parents' faults; and parents by the faults of their children. In the ministerial relation, this happens as frequently as in any. If a minister seek his own glory instead of God's, or be remiss in the duties of the closet, his people will suffer as well as he: the ordinances from whence they should derive nutriment will be to them "as dry breasts or a miscarrying womb." If the people slight the ministry of a faithful man, what wonder is it if God remove the candlestick from those who will not avail themselves of the light? If, on the other hand, they idolize their minister, and put him, as it were, in the place of God, what wonder is it if God, who is a jealous God, leave him to fall, that they may see the folly of their idolatry; or take him from them, that they may learn where alone their dependence should be? Let the death of Moses, and the bereavement of the Israelites, be a

warning to us all; that we provoke not God by our rebellions to withhold from us the blessings we desire, or to inflict upon us the punishments we deserve.]

2. To submit with humility to afflictive dispensations—

[When once Moses was informed of the decided purpose of God, he forbore to ask for any alteration of it; nor did he utter one murmuring or discontented word concerning it. God had bidden him to be satisfied with the mercies which he was about to receive; and he was satisfied with them. Now it may be that God has denied us many things which we could have wished to possess, or taken from us things which we have possessed. But if he have given us grace, and mercy, and peace through our Lord Jesus Christ, what reason can we have to complain? We have prayed to him perhaps under our trials, and they have not been removed; or we have deprecated them, and they have still been inflicted. But God has said to us, "Let it suffice thee" that I have made thee a partaker of my grace: "let it suffice thee" that I have given thee prospects of the promised land: "let it suffice thee" that thou hast a portion in a better world. And shall not these things be sufficient for us, though we be destitute of every thing else? Shall any of the concerns of time or sense be of much importance in our eyes, when we are so highly privileged, so greatly enriched? Ah! check the first risings of a murmuring thought, all ye who are ready to complain of your afflictions. Think whether you would exchange one Pisgah view of heaven for all that this earth can give: and, if you would not, then think, how richly heaven itself will compensate for all your light and momentary afflictions: and, instead of indulging any anxiety about the things of this world, let the prayer of David be the continual language both of your hearts and lips[e].]

3. To serve God with increasing activity to the end of life—

[The last month of Moses' continuance on earth was as fully occupied with the work of God as any month of his life. Though he knew that he must die within a few days, he did not intermit his labours in the least, but rather addressed himself to them with increasing energy and fidelity. This was the effect of very abundant grace: and it was an example but rarely copied. How many towards the close of life, when they know, not from revelation indeed, but from their own feelings, that they must shortly die, become cold in their affections, slothful in their habits, querulous in their tempers, and remiss

[e] Ps. cvi. 4, 5.

in their duties! Instead of taking occasion from the shortness of their time, to labour with increased diligence, how many yield to their infirmities, and make their weakness an excuse for wilful indolence! The Lord grant, that no such declensions may take place in any of us; but that rather "our last days may be our best days;" and that our Lord, finding us both watchful and active, may applaud us as good and faithful servants, prepared and fitted for his heavenly kingdom!]

## CLXXXIX.

### JOSHUA A TYPE OF CHRIST.

Deut. iii. 27, 28. *Thou shalt not go over this Jordan. But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him; for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.*

IN reading the records of God's dealings with the Jews, we are sometimes tempted to bring him to the bar of human reason, and to arraign his character as severe. Such hasty judgment, however, would be impious in the extreme; since we are wholly incompetent to decide upon matters, which are so far beyond our reach. There may be, and doubtless are, ten thousand reasons to justify his conduct, where our slender capacities cannot find any: and such light has been cast upon his procedure, in many instances, by the Gospel, as may fully evince the necessity of shutting our mouths, and of giving him credit for perfect equity, even where his dispensations most oppose our natural feelings. We may instance this in the exclusion of Moses from the promised land. He had brought the people out of Egypt, and, with most unparalleled meekness, had endured their perverseness forty years in the wilderness: yet, when he had led them to the very borders of Canaan, he was not suffered to go in with them; but, on account of one single offence, was obliged to devolve on Joshua his office, his authority, his honours; yea, he was forbidden even to pray for an admission into that good land[a]. Dark as this dispensation must have

[a] ver. 23—27.

appeared at the time, *we* are enabled to discern a propriety and excellency in it. It was altogether of a typical nature: for while *he* represented the law, Joshua, his successor, was a very eminent type of Christ. The text naturally leads us to shew this: and we shall,

I. Trace the resemblance which exists between Joshua and the Lord Jesus Christ—

Joshua resembles Christ—

1. In his name—

[The name of *Joshua* was intended to designate his work and office. His name originally was Osea, but was altered by Moses to Joshua[b]. This, doubtless, was of God's appointment, that he might be thereby rendered a more remarkable type of Jesus. This name imported, that he should be *a divine saviour*[c]; and though, in the strictest and fullest sense, it could not properly belong to him; yet, as he was to be such a distinguished representative of Jesus, it was very properly given to him.

The name of *Jesus* still more fitly characterized the work that was to be performed by *him*. This name is precisely the same with Joshua in the Greek language; and repeatedly do we, in the New Testament, translate it, "Jesus," when it ought rather to have been translated, "Joshua[d]." It was given to our Lord by the angel, before he was conceived in the womb[e]: and the express reason of it was assigned, namely, that "he should *save* his people from their sins." To him it is applicable in the fullest extent, because he is "God manifest in the flesh," "Emmanuel, God with us;" and because he is the author, not of a typical and temporary, but of a real and eternal, salvation to all his followers[f].]

This striking coincidence, with respect to the name, may prepare us for fuller discoveries of a resemblance,

2. In his office—

[Joshua was appointed to lead the Israelites into the promised land. Moses was not permitted to do this. He was destined to represent the law, which was admirably calculated to lead men through the wilderness, but could never bring them into the land of Canaan: one offence against it destroyed all hope of salvation by it[g]: it made no provision for mercy: its

[b] Numb. xiii. 16.
[c] *Jah*, which was prefixed to his name, is the name of God.
[d] Acts vii. 45. Heb. iv. 8. [e] Matt. i. 21. [f] Heb. v. 9.
[g] Gal. iii. 10.

terms were simply, Do this and live[h]: and, for an example of its inexorable rigour, Moses himself was, for one unadvised word, excluded from the land of promise. The office of saving men must belong to another; and, for this reason, it was transferred to Joshua, who had been both appointed to it, and thoroughly qualified by God for the discharge of it[i].

Jesus also was commissioned to bring his followers into the Canaan that is above. He, probably in reference to Joshua, is styled the Captain of our salvation[k]: and he appeared to Joshua himself in this very character, proclaiming himself to be the Captain of the Lord's host[l]. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh," the Lord Jesus Christ came to effect[m]. He has been divinely qualified for the work; and, like Joshua, was "encouraged to it, and strengthened in it," by an assurance of God's continual presence, and support[n]. He leads his people on from grace to grace, from strength to strength, from victory to victory[o]. Nor will he ever desist from his work, till he shall have subdued his enemies, and established his people in their promised inheritance.]

Happily for us the resemblance may be likewise traced,

3. In his success—

[Nothing could oppose any effectual bar to Joshua's progress. Though Jordan had overflowed its banks, its waters were divided, to open him a path on dry land[p]. The impregnable walls of Jericho, merely at the sound of rams' horns, were made to fall[q]. Confederate kings fled before him[r]. City after city, kingdom after kingdom, were subjected to his all-conquering arms: and almost the whole accursed race of Canaanites were extirpated, and destroyed[s]. The promised land was divided by him amongst his followers[t]: and he appealed to them with his dying breath, that not so much as one, of all the promises that God had given them, had ever failed[u].

And shall less be said respecting our adorable Emmanuel? He "triumphed over all the principalities and powers" of hell; and causes his followers to trample on the necks of their mightiest foes[x]. He leads them safely through the swellings of Jordan, when they come to the border of the promised land[y]; and, having given them the victory, he divides among

[h] Rom. x. 5. [i] Deut. xxxiv. 9. [k] Heb. ii. 10.
[l] Josh. v. 13—15. [m] Rom. viii. 3. [n] Isai. xlii. 1, 4, 6.
[o] Ps. lxxxiv. 7. 2 Cor. iii. 18. Rev. vi. 2. [p] Josh. iii. 17.
[q] Josh. vi. 20. [r] Josh. x. 16. [s] Josh. xii. 7.
[t] Josh. xi. 23. and xviii. 10. [u] Josh. xxiii. 14.
[x] Rom. xvi. 20. with Josh. x. 24. [y] Isai. xliii. 2.

them the heavenly inheritance[z]. Thus will all of them be put into possession of "that rest, which remained for them[a]," in the hope and expectation of which they endured the labours of travel, and the fatigues of war.]

Having traced the resemblance between Joshua and Christ, I will,

II. Take occasion to suggest from it some salutary advice—

1. To those who desire to possess the promised land—

[Grieved I am to say, that many desire that good land, yet never attain unto it; first, because they do not seek it with sufficient earnestness; and next, because they do not seek it in God's appointed way. Respecting the former of these our blessed Lord says, "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate: for many shall *seek* to enter in, and not be able[b]:" and of the latter, the Apostle Paul, speaking of the great mass of the Jewish people, says, that, though they "followed after the law of righteousness, they did not attain to the law of righteousness; because *they sought it not by faith*, but as it were by the works of the law[c]." He bare them record that they had a zeal of God: but it was not according to knowledge: for, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they would not submit themselves to the righteousness of God. Christ was the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believed. "But they, instead of believing in him for salvation, stumbled at him as a stumbling-stone and a rock of offence;" and thus *they* perished, whilst the Gentiles by believing in him were saved[d]. Now, my brethren, I cannot too earnestly impress upon your minds the necessity of abandoning altogether the law of Moses *as a ground of hope before God*, and of *trusting entirely in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation*. If Moses himself was not suffered to lead his followers into the earthly Canaan, or even to go in thither himself, much less can he lead you into the heavenly Canaan. *As a guide through the wilderness*, Moses is excellent: but *as a Saviour*, he will be of no use. Joshua alone can give you the possession of the promised land; that is, Jesus alone can effect your complete salvation. If you read the epistles of St. Paul to the Romans and Galatians, you will find the main scope of both is to establish and enforce this truth. Bear in remembrance then that you must "die to the law,"

[z] Matt. xxv. 34. [a] Heb. iv. 1, 9, 11. [b] Luke xiii. 24.
[c] Rom. ix. 30—33. [d] Rom. x. 2—4.

and seek salvation by Christ alone: for "by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified."]

2. To those who are fighting for the possession of it—

[Though Canaan was *promised* to the Israelites, yet they must *fight for it*. And you must also fight for the promised inheritance of heaven. Remember however, that you are not to fight in your own strength. You must "be strong in the Lord and in the power of *his* might," if you would gain the victory over your spiritual enemies. And this is your great encouragement: for through *Him* the weakest shall be strong, yea, shall prove "more than conqueror" over all his enemies." What took place in the contest of Israel with the Midianites shall be accomplished in God's Israel throughout all the world. Against the numerous hosts of Midian only twelve thousand armed Israelites (a thousand from each tribe) were sent to fight: and when the whole Midianitish army was destroyed, it was found, on investigation, that not a single Israelite was slain[e]. So shall it prove with you, my brethren, in your spiritual warfare. Only fight manfully in the Saviour's strength; and what he said to his heavenly Father in reference to his disciples while he was yet upon earth, he will repeat before the whole assembled universe in the day of judgment, "Of those whom thou hast given me, not one is lost[f]." True, there are Anakims of gigantic stature to contend with, and cities walled up to heaven to besiege: but "greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world:" and all your enemies, with Satan at their head, "shall be bruised under your feet shortly[g]." "They all are but, as it were, bread for you[h]," and not one shall ever be able to stand before you.]

3. To those who yet retain their hostility to the Lord Jesus—

[You have seen what was the issue of the contest between Joshua, and all the kingdoms of Canaan. No less than thirty-one kings fell before him[i]. And be sure that you also must perish, if you continue to fight against our adorable Lord and Saviour. I would earnestly recommend to you the example of the Gibeonites. They felt assured, that they could not withstand Joshua; and therefore, feigning themselves to belong to a nation remote from Canaan, they came, and entreated him to make a league with them. There needs no such collusion on your part. You may come to Jesus, and he will

[e] Numb. xxxi. 49. [f] John xvii. 12. [g] Rom. xvi. 20.
[h] Numb. xiv. 9. [i] Josh. xii. 24.

enter into covenant with you to spare you[k]. And, if your submission to him provoke the hostility of the world against you, he will come to your support, and will save you by a great deliverance[l]; and will make you eternal monuments of his power and grace. Let me also recommend to you the example of Rahab. She cast herself and all her family on the mercy of Joshua; and bound the cord wherewith she had let down the spies from the walls of Jericho, about her window, as the sign of her affiance in the pledge that had been given her. For this faith of hers, and for her works consequent upon it, was she commended both by St. Paul, and St. James[m]. And, if you also with like faith cast yourselves upon the Lord Jesus, and, like her, evince also by your conduct the sincerity of your faith, you "shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation," and have a portion accorded to you amongst the Israel of God for ever and ever.]

[k] Josh. ix. 15. [l] Josh. x. 4.
[m] Josh. vi. 22, 25. with Heb. xi. 31. and Jam. ii. 25.

## CXC.

### MOSES' SOLEMN CHARGE TO ISRAEL.

Deut. iv. 7—9. *What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous, as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life; but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons.*

PRACTICAL religion, however approved in theory, is not always admired when exhibited to our view. Not but that it has a beauty in it which commends itself to those who have a spiritual discernment; but it forms too strong a contrast with the ways of the world to gain its favour: the men of this world "love darkness rather than light;" and therefore agree to reprobate as visionary and gloomy, whatever opposes their evil habits. Nevertheless "the fear of the Lord, *that* is wisdom, and to depart from evil, *that* is understanding:" and, wherever any people are enabled to maintain an uniform and consistent conduct, there their very enemies must honour

them in their hearts, and confess them to be "a wise and understanding people." This at least was the opinion of Moses, who from that very consideration urged the Jews to contemplate their high privileges, and to walk worthy of them[a]. To advance the same blessed end in you, we shall state,

I. The peculiar privileges of the Jewish nation—

They were certainly advanced above all the nations upon earth; as in other respects, so particularly,

1. In their nearness to God—

[Moses had enjoyed such access to God as no man had ever done before: and "conversed with him face to face, even as a man converseth with his friend[b]." That generation to whom he ministered, had seen on many occasions the efficacy of his intercessions, and therefore could appreciate the force of that observation in the text, "What nation is there that hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" Nor was this privilege to be confined to Moses: the high-priest was furnished with an ephod and a breast-plate, by means of which he was to inquire of God in every difficulty, and to obtain answers from him. This was used from time to time, even till the Jews were carried captive to Babylon: and the great privilege of having such means of communion with God may be sufficiently seen in the advantage which David repeatedly derived from it, to learn the intentions of his enemies, and to gain direction respecting his own conduct[c]. The heathen indeed had their oracles, which they consulted; but from which they could derive no certain information. The ambiguity of the answers given by them, left room for opposite constructions, and proved that no dependence whatever could be placed upon them. Those oracles were a compound of lying priestcraft, and diabolic influence: and were no more to be compared with the oracle of God, than the light of a deceitful vapour with that of the meridian sun.]

2. In the excellence of the dispensation under which they lived—

["The statutes and judgments" which Moses had delivered to them were altogether "righteous" and good. The *judicial* law, which was given for the regulation of their civil polity, was founded in perfect equity, and conducive in every point to the happiness of the community. The *moral* law was a transcript

[a] ver. 5, 6. with the text. [b] Exod. xxxiii. 11.
[c] See 1 Sam. xxiii. 9—12. and xxx. 7, 8.

of the mind and will of God: it was in every respect "holy, and just, and good," and, if followed in every part, would assimilate the people to God himself. The *ceremonial* law also, notwithstanding it was burthensome in many respects, afforded peace and comfort to all who were bowed down with a sense of sin, and desirous of finding acceptance with an offended God. As for the heathen world, they had none of these advantages: they had no such light for the government of their states, no such instruction for the regulation of their conduct, no such consolations under the convictions of guilt or the dread of punishment. They had no better guide than their own weak unassisted reason: and though by means of that they were able to frame laws for the public good, they never could devise a system whereby the soul should be restored to holiness or peace. In these respects the Jews were elevated above all the world. The excellence and authority of their laws were undisputed; and every one was made happy by his observance of them.]

But still the Jews themselves had little to boast of in comparison of,

II. The superior privileges which we enjoy—

Our access to God is much nearer than theirs—

[They had, it is true, in some respects the advantage. No person now can hope for such special directions as were imparted by the Urim and Thummim. But it must be remembered that this mode of ascertaining the mind of God was of necessity confined to few: it was not possible for every person to go to the high-priest, and to obtain his mediation with the Deity on every subject that might require light: this liberty could be used by few, and only on occasions of great public importance. But our access to the Deity is unlimited: every person, at all times, in every place, on every occasion, may come to God, without the intervention of a fellow-creature: in this respect every child of God is on a par with the high-priest himself, or rather, is elevated to a state far above him, in proportion as a *spiritual* approach is nearer than that which is *bodily*, and an *immediate* access is nearer than that which is through the *medium* of an ephod and a breast-plate. Indeed the liberty given to us is unbounded: "In *every* thing we may make our requests known unto God;" and we may "ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us." Though therefore the Jews were privileged beyond the Gentiles, whose gods of wood and stone could not attend to their supplications, yet we are no less privileged above *them*, and can adopt a language unknown to them, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."]

Our dispensation too is more excellent than theirs—

[We need not to disparage theirs in any respect, in order to raise in our estimation that under which we live. We may give to that all the honour it deserves, and yet not be afraid that ours will suffer any thing in the comparison. Theirs, excellent as it was, was only a shadow, of which ours is the substance. Whatever good theirs had, is retained and perfected in ours; whatever it had that was weak and burthensome, is done away. The peace which that afforded to the guilty conscience was slight and temporary: the very means of forgiveness were only so many fresh remembrances of unforgiven sin: but the peace obtained by us "passeth all understanding:" the joy we taste is "unspeakable and full of glory." The blood of bulls and of goats afforded a very weak ground for hope, in comparison of the blood of God's only-begotten Son: *that* "cleanseth from all sin," and "perfects for ever them that are sanctified." Again, the law of the ten commandments denounced a curse for one single violation of them, however small; and afforded no assistance to those who desired to fulfil it: but the precepts of the Gospel, though as holy and as perfect as the Law itself, are accompanied with promises of grace and offers of mercy to all who endeavour to obey them: God undertakes to write them on our hearts, so as to make a compliance with them both easy and delightful. In a word, their law was a yoke of bondage, productive only of slavish fears, and ineffectual efforts: whereas our law, the law of faith, begets a filial spirit, and transforms us "into the image of our God in righteousness and true holiness." Compare the two dispensations, and we shall see in a moment our superior advantages: for whilst they were only slaves under the lash, we have the happiness of being "sons and heirs."]

If such be our distinguished privileges, it becomes us to consider,

III. Our duty in reference to them—

This was a point which Moses was extremely anxious to impress on the mind of every individual; "*Only* take heed to *thyself*, and keep thy soul diligently." In like manner would we urge you in relation to the privileges you enjoy,

1. To keep up the remembrance of them in your own hearts—

[It is scarcely necessary to observe, how apt we are to forget the mercies which God has vouchsafed unto us. The mere facts indeed may easily be retained in our heads; but a due sense

of the kindness expressed in them, and of the obligations conferred by them, is not easily preserved upon the soul. The smallest trifle is sufficient to draw us from heavenly contemplations, and to engage those affections, which should be exclusively fixed on God. Hence Moses bade the people "take heed, lest the things which they had seen should depart from their *heart*[d]." What then must we do? We must avoid the things which would weaken our sense of God's mercies to us; and abound in those exercises which will keep alive the sense of them upon our hearts. Worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly company, should all be regarded by us with a godly fear and jealousy, lest they "choke the seed" which is springing up in our hearts, and prevent us from "bringing forth fruit unto perfection." On the other hand, our meditation on the Christian's privileges should be frequent: we should muse on them, till the fire kindle in our hearts, and we are constrained to speak of them with our tongues. It is thus that we must trim the lamps of our sanctuary; it is thus that we must be keeping up the fire on the altar of our hearts. In a word, if we will improve our privileges, we shall have them augmented and confirmed: if, on the other hand, we slumber over them, we shall give advantage to our enemy to despoil us of them[e].]

2. To transmit the memory of them to posterity—

[The Jews were made depositaries of divine knowledge for the good of the Christian Church: and it is in the same light that we are to consider the Scriptures which are committed to us; they are not for our personal benefit merely, but for the use of the Church in all future ages. Hence then we are bound to "teach them to our sons, and our sons' sons." It is greatly to be lamented indeed that so little attention is paid to the sacred oracles in the public seminaries of learning. Something of a form indeed may be observed; a form, from which the very persons who enforce it neither expect nor desire any practical effect: but if one half the pains were taken to make us understand and feel the exalted privileges of Christianity, as are bestowed on elucidating the beauties of classic writers, or exploring the depths of science and philosophy, we should see religion and morals in a very different state amongst us. It was for the instructing of their children in righteousness that the awful transactions that took place at Mount Horeb were required to be more particularly impressed on all succeeding generations[f]: and if the law from Mount Sinai was to be so carefully communicated to the children of Jews, ought not "the law that came forth from Mount Zion[g]," even "the law of faith," to be proclaimed to our children? If *they* were to

[d] See also Heb. ii. 1. [e] Matt. xiii. 12. [f] ver. 10. [g] Isai. ii. 3.

remember Horeb, shall not *we* remember Bethlehem, where the Son of God was born into the world; and Calvary, where he shed his blood; and Olivet, from whence he ascended up to heaven, and led captive all the powers of darkness? Yes surely, these great transactions should be dwelt upon, not as mere historical facts, but as truths whereon are founded all the hopes and expectations of sinful man: and we cannot but regard it as a blessing to the Christian world, that days are set apart for the special remembrance of those great events; that so not one of them may be overlooked, but that all in succession may be presented to the view of every Christian in the land. Let us then habituate ourselves to dwell upon them as the most delightful of all subjects[h], and "account both our time and money well spent in promoting the knowledge of them in the world."]

[h] Deut. xi. 18—20.

## CXCI.

### EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY.[a]

Deut. v. 28, 29. *They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!*

THE historical parts of the Old Testament are more worthy of our attention than men generally imagine. A multitude of facts recorded in them are replete with spiritual instruction, being intended by God to serve as emblems of those deep mysteries which were afterwards to be revealed. For instance: What is related of our first parent, his creation, his marriage, his sabbatic rest, was emblematic of that new creation which God will produce in us, and of that union with Christ whereby it shall be effected, and of the glorious rest to which it shall introduce us, as well in this world as in the world to come. In like manner the promises made to Adam, to Abraham, and to David, whatever reference they might have to the particular circumstances of those illustrious individuals, had a further and more important accomplishment in the Lord Jesus Christ,

[a] This and the following Sermons on the same subject were preached before the University of Cambridge.

who is the second Adam, the Promised Seed, the King of Israel.

The whole of the Mosaic dispensation was altogether figurative, as we see from the Epistle to the Hebrews, in which the figures themselves are illustrated and explained. But there are some facts which appear too trifling to afford any instruction of this kind. We might expect indeed that so remarkable a fact as the promulgation of the Law from Mount Sinai should have in it something mysterious; but that the fears of the people on that occasion, and the request dictated by those fears, should be intended by God to convey any particular instruction, we should not have readily supposed: yet by these did God intend to shadow forth the whole mystery of Redemption. We are sure that there was somewhat remarkable in the people's speech, by the commendation which God himself bestowed upon it: still however, unless we have turned our minds particularly to the subject, we shall scarcely conceive how much is contained in it.

The point for our consideration is, *The request which the Israelites made in consequence of the terror with which the display of the Divine Majesty had inspired them.* The explication and improvement of that point is all that properly belongs to the passage before us. But we have a further view in taking this text: we propose, after considering it in its true and proper sense, to take it in an improper and accommodated sense; and, after making some observations upon it *in reference to the request which the Israelites then offered,* to notice it *in reference to the requests which we from time to time make unto God in the Liturgy of our Established Church.*

The former view of the text is that which we propose for our present consideration: the latter will be reserved for future discussion.

The Israelites made an earnest request to God: and God expressed his approbation of it in the words which we have just recited; "They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such

an heart in them!" From hence we are naturally led to set before you The *sentiments* and *dispositions* which God approves;—the *sentiments;* "They have well said all that they have spoken;"—the *dispositions;* "O that there were in them such an heart!"

I. The sentiments which he approves.

Here it will be necessary to analyze, as it were, or at least to get a clear and distinct apprehension of, the speech which God commends. It is recorded in the preceding context from the 23d verse. "And it came to pass, when ye heard the voice out of the midst of the darkness, (for the mountain did burn with fire,) that ye came near unto me, even all the heads of your tribes, and your elders; and ye said, Behold, the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory, and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day, that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh that hath heard the voice of the living God, speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say; and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee, and we will hear it, and do it." Then it is added, "And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me, I have heard the voice of the words of this people, which they have spoken unto thee: they have well said all that they have spoken."

Now in this speech are contained the following things; An acknowledgment that they could not stand before the Divine Majesty;—A desire that God would appoint some one to mediate between him and them;—and lastly, An engagement to regard every word that should be delivered to them through a Mediator, with the same obediential reverence, as they would if it were spoken to them by God himself. And these are the sentiments, on which

the commendation in our text was unreservedly bestowed.

The first thing then to be noticed is, *Their acknowledgment that they could not stand before the Divine Majesty.*

Many things had now occurred to produce an extraordinary degree of terror upon their minds. There was a blackness and darkness in the sky, such as they never before beheld. This darkness was rendered more visible by the whole adjacent mountain blazing with fire, and by vivid lightnings flashing all around in quick succession. The roaring peals of thunder added an awful solemnity to the scene. The trumpet sounding with a long and increasingly tremendous blast, accompanied as it was by the mountain shaking to its centre, appalled the trembling multitude: and Jehovah's voice, uttering with inconceivable majesty his authoritative commands, caused even Moses himself to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake[b]." In consequence of this terrific scene, we are told that the people "removed and stood afar off[c]," lest the fire should consume them, or the voice of God strike them dead upon the spot[d]. Now though this was in them a mere slavish fear, and the request founded upon it had respect only to their temporal safety, yet the sentiment itself was good, and worthy of universal adoption. God being hidden from our senses, so that we neither see nor hear him, we are ready to think lightly of him, and even to rush into his more immediate presence without any holy awe upon our minds: but when he speaks to us in thunder or by an earthquake, the most hardened rebel is made to feel that "with God is terrible majesty," and that "he is to be had in reverence by all that are round about him." This is a lesson which God has abundantly taught us by his dealings with the Jews. Among the men of Bethshemesh, a great multitude were slain for their irreverent curiosity in looking into the ark: as Uzzah also

[b] Compare Exod. xix. 16—19. with Heb. xii. 18—21.
[c] Exod. xx. 18, 19. [d] Exod. xx. 21.

afterwards was for his well-meant but erroneous zeal in presuming to touch it. The reason of such acts of severity is told us in the history of Nadab and Abihu, who were struck dead for offering strange fire on the altar of their God: they are designed to teach us, "that God will be sanctified in all that come nigh unto him, and before all the people he will be glorified[e]."

The next thing to be noticed is, *Their desire to have some person appointed who should act as a Mediator between God and them.* They probably had respect only to the present occasion: but God interpreted their words as general, and as importing a request that he would send them a permanent Mediator, who should transact all their business, as it were, with God, making known to him their wants, and communicating from him the knowledge of his will. That God did construe their words in this extended sense, we are informed by Moses in a subsequent chapter of this book. In Deut. xviii. 15th and following verses, this explanation of the matter is given: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye hearken, *according to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb, in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken.* I WILL RAISE THEM UP A PROPHET FROM AMONG THEIR BRETHREN, like unto thee, and will put my words in HIS mouth; and HE shall speak unto them all that I command him: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words, which HE shall speak in my name, I will require it of him." Who *this* Prophet was, we are at no loss to declare: for the Apostle Peter, endeavouring to convince the Jews from their own Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ, and that Moses himself had required them to believe in him, *cites these very words as*

[e] Lev. x. 1—3.

*referring to Christ*, and calls upon them to regard him as that very Mediator, whom God had sent in answer to the petitions which had been offered by their forefathers at Mount Horeb[f].

Here it should be remembered that we are speaking, not from conjecture, but from infallible authority; and that the construction we are putting on the text is, not a fanciful interpretation of our own, but God's own exposition of his own words.

Behold then the sentiment expressed in our text, and the commendation given to it by God himself: it is a sentiment, which is the very sum and substance of the whole Gospel: it is a sentiment, which whosoever embraces truly, and acts upon it faithfully, can never perish, but shall have eternal life. The preceding sentiment, that we are incapable of standing before an holy God, is good, as introductory to this; but *this* is the crown of all; this consciousness that we *cannot* come to God, and that God *will not* come to us, but through CHRIST. This acquiescence in HIM as the divinely appointed Mediator; this acceptance of him as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life;" *this sentiment*, I say, God did, and will, approve, wheresoever it may be found. The Lord grant that we may all embrace this sentiment as we ought; and that, having tasted its sweetness and felt its efficacy, we may attain by means of it all the blessings which a due reception of it will ensure!

The third thing to be noticed is, *Their engagement to yield unqualified obedience to every thing that should be spoken to them by the Mediator.* This, if viewed only as a general promise of obedience, was good, and highly acceptable to God; since the obedience of his creatures is the very end of all his dispensations towards them. It is, to bring them to obedience, that he alarms them by the denunciations of his wrath, and encourages them by the promises of his Gospel: when once they are brought to love his law, and obey his commandments, all the designs of his love and mercy are accomplished; and nothing remains

[f] Acts iii. 22, 23.

but that they attain that measure of sanctification, that shall fit them for the glory which he has prepared for them.

But there is far more in this part of our subject than appears at first sight. We will endeavour to enter into it somewhat more minutely, in order to explain what we conceive to be contained in it.

The moral law was never given with a view to men's obtaining salvation by their obedience to it; for it was not possible that they who had transgressed it in any one particular, should afterwards be justified by it. St. Paul says, "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law[g]." But the law could not give life to fallen man: and therefore that way of obtaining righteousness is for ever closed. With what view then was the law given? I answer, to shew the existence of sin, and the lost state of man by reason of sin, and to shut him up to that way of obtaining mercy, which God has revealed in his Gospel. I need not multiply passages in proof of this; two will suffice to establish it beyond a doubt: "As many as are under the law, are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Again, "The law is our schoolmaster, to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith[h]." But when the law has answered this end, then it has a further use, namely, to make known to us the way in which we should walk. In the first instance we are to flee from it *as a covenant*, and to seek for mercy through the Mediator: but when we have obtained mercy through the Mediator, then we are to receive the law at his hands *as a rule of life*, and to render a willing obedience to it.

Now all this was shadowed forth in the history before us. God gave Israel his law immediately from his own mouth: and, so given, it terrified them beyond measure, and caused them to desire a Mediator. At the same time they did not express any wish to be

[g] Gal. iii. 21. [h] Gal. iii. 10. and 24.

liberated from obedience to it: on the contrary, they engaged, that, whatever God should speak to them by the Mediator, they would listen to it readily, and obey it unreservedly. This was right; and God both approved of it in them, and will approve of it in every child of man.

We are afraid of perplexing the subject, if we dwell any longer on this branch of it; because it would divert your attention from the main body of the discourse: we will therefore content ourselves with citing one passage, wherein the whole is set forth in the precise point of view in which we have endeavoured to place it. We have shewn that the transactions at Mount Sinai were intended to shadow forth the nature of the two dispensations (that of the Law and that of the Gospel) in a contrasted view; that the terrific nature of the one made the Israelites desirous to obtain an interest in the other; and that the appointment of Moses to be their Mediator, and to communicate to them the further knowledge of his will with a view to their future obedience, was altogether illustrative of the Gospel; which, whilst it teaches us to flee to Christ from the curses of the broken law, requires us afterwards to obey that law: in a word, we have shewn, that though, as St. Paul expresses it, we are "without law," (considered as a covenant,) we are nevertheless "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ[1]:" and all this is set forth in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in the following words: "Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard, entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) but ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 21.

an innumerable company of angels, to the general Assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and *to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant*, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel[k]."

I would only observe, in order to prevent any misconception of my meaning, that I do not suppose the Israelites to have had a distinct view of these things, such as we have at present; but that they spake like Caiaphas the high-priest, when he said, "It was expedient for one man to die for the people, rather than that the whole nation should perish[l]:" they did not understand the full import of their own words; but God overruled their present feelings so that they spake what was proper to shadow forth the mysteries of his Gospel; and he then interpreted their words according to the full and comprehensive sense in which he intended they should be understood.

We could gladly have added somewhat more in confirmation of the sentiments which have been set before you, and particularly as founded on the passage we are considering; but your time forbids it; and therefore we pass on to notice,

II. The *dispositions* which God approves.

These must be noticed with a direct reference to the *sentiments* already considered: for God, having said, "They have well said all that they have spoken," adds, "O that there were such an heart in them!"

It is but too common for those desires which arise in the mind under some peculiarly alarming circumstances, to prove only transient, and to yield in a very little time to the rooted inclination of the heart. This, it is to be feared, was the case with Israel at that time: and God himself intimated, that the seed which thus hastily sprang up, would soon perish for want of a sufficient root. But the information which we derive from hence is wholly independent of them:

[k] Heb. xii. 18—24. [l] John xi. 49—52.

whether they cultivated these dispositions or not, we see what dispositions God approves. It is his wish to find in all of us, *A reverential fear of God—A love to Jesus as our Mediator*—and *An unfeigned delight in his commands.*

First, he desires to find in us *A reverential fear of God.* That ease, that indifference, that security, which men in general indulge, is most displeasing to him. Behold, how he addresses men of this description by the Prophet Jeremiah: "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not: Fear ye not me? saith the Lord: will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart; they are revolted and gone: neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God[m]." Hear too what he says by the Prophet Zephaniah: "I will search Jerusalem with candles, and will punish the men that are settled on their lees[n]." It is thought by many, that, if they commit no flagrant enormity, they have no cause to fear: but even a heathen, when brought to a right mind, saw the folly and impiety of such a conceit, and issued a decree to all the subjects of his realm, that they should all "tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, who is the living God, and steadfast for ever[o]." Such a state of mind is dreaded, from an idea that it must of necessity be destructive of all happiness. This however is not true: on the contrary, the more of holy fear we have in our hearts, the happier we shall be. If indeed our fear be only of a slavish kind, it will make us unhappy; but, in proportion as it partakes of filial regard, and has respect to God as a Father, it will become a source of unspeakable peace and joy. The testimony of Solomon is, "Happy is the man that

[m] Jer. v. 21—24. [n] Zeph. i. 12. [o] Dan. vi. 26.

feareth alway[p]." Nor should we shun even the slavish fear, since it is generally the prelude to that which is truly filial; the spirit of bondage is intended to lead us to a spirit of adoption, whereby we may cry, Abba, Father[q]. Another ground on which men endeavour to put away the fear of God is, that it argues weakness of understanding and meanness of spirit; but we are told on infallible authority, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever[r]." Permit me then to recommend to you this holy disposition. Learn to "fear that glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD[s]." Stand in awe of his Divine Majesty: and dread his displeasure more than death itself. Bethink yourselves, How you shall appear before him in the day of judgment. Settle it in your minds, whether you will think as lightly of him when you are standing at his tribunal, with all his terrible majesty displayed before your eyes, as you are wont to do now that he is hid from your sight. Examine carefully whether you are prepared to meet him, and to receive your final doom at his hands. I well know, that such thoughts are not welcome to the carnal mind: but I know also that they are salutary, yea, and indispensably necessary too for every child of man. I would therefore adopt the language of the angel, who flew in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth, even to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people; and like him I would say with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come[t]:" it is come already in the divine purpose; and it will speedily come to every individual amongst us, and will fix us in an eternity of bliss or woe.

The next disposition which God would have us cultivate, is, *A love to Jesus as our Mediator*. In proportion as we fear God, we shall love the Lord Jesus

[p] Prov. xxviii. 14. [q] Rom. viii. 15. [r] Ps. cxi. 10.
[s] Deut. xxviii. 58. [t] Rev. xiv. 6, 7.

Christ, who has condescended to mediate between God and us. Were it only that he, like Moses, had revealed to us the will of God in a less terrific way, we ought to love him: but he has done infinitely more for us than Moses could possibly do; he has not only stood between God and us, but has placed himself in our stead, and borne the wrath of God for us. He has not only silenced the thunders of Mount Sinai, but "has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being himself made a curse for us[u]." In a word, "He has made reconciliation for us by the blood of his cross;" so that we may now come to God as our Father and our Friend; and may expect at his hands all the blessings of grace and glory. "Through him we have access to God," even to his throne; and by faith in him we may even now receive the remission of our sins, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Shall we not then love him? Shall we not honour him? Shall we not employ him in his high office as our Advocate and Mediator? Shall we not glory in him, and "cleave unto him with full purpose of heart?" It was said by the Prophet Isaiah, "Surely, shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed. In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory[x]." O that this prophecy may be fulfilled in us; and that there may henceforth "be in every individual amongst us such an heart!"

Lastly, God would behold in us *An unfeigned delight in his commandments.* This *will be* the fruit, and *must be* the evidence, of our love to Christ: "If ye love me," says our Lord, "keep my commandments[y]:" and again, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me[z]." Indeed without this, ALL our sentiments or professions are of no avail: "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God[a]."

[u] Gal. iii. 13. [x] Isai. xlv. 24, 25. [y] John xiv. 15.
[z] John xiv. 21. [a] 1 Cor. vii. 19.

When persons hear of our being "delivered from the law," and "dead to the law," they feel a jealousy upon the subject of morality, and begin to fear that we open to men the flood-gates of licentiousness: but their fears are both unnecessary and unscriptural; for the very circumstance of our being delivered from the law as a covenant of works, is that which most forcibly constrains us to take it as a rule of life. Hear how St. Paul speaks on this subject: "I, through the law, am dead to the law, *that I might live unto God*[b]:" and again, "My brethren, ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, *that we should bring forth fruit unto God*[c]." You perceive then that the liberty to which we are brought by Jesus Christ, has the most friendly aspect imaginable upon the practice of good works, yea, rather, that it absolutely secures the performance of them. Whilst therefore we would urge with all possible earnestness a simple affiance in Christ as your Mediator, we would also entreat you to receive the commandments at his hands, and to observe them with your whole hearts. Take our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, for instance: study with care and diligence the full import of every precept in it. Do not endeavour to bring down those precepts to your practice, or to the practice of the world around you; but rather strive to elevate your practice to the standard which he has given you. In like manner, take all the precepts contained in the epistles, and all the holy dispositions which were exercised by the Apostles; and endeavour to emulate the examples of the most distinguished saints. You are cautioned not to be *righteous over-much;* but remember, that you have at least equal need of caution to be *righteous enough.* If only you walk in the steps of our Lord and his Apostles, you need not be afraid of excess: it is an *erroneous kind* of righteousness, against which Solomon would guard you, and not against an *excessive degree* of true holiness; for in

[b] Gal. ii. 19. [c] Rom. vii. 4.

true holiness there can be no excess. In this we may vie with each other, and strive with all our might. St. Paul says, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they who have believed in God might be careful to maintain (or, as the word imports, to excel in) good works." By these we shall evince the sincerity of our love to Christ; and by these we shall be judged in the last day. I would therefore recommend to every one to ask himself, What is there which I have left undone? What is there which I have done defectively? What is there which I have done amiss? What is there that I may do more earnestly for the honour of God, for the good of mankind, and for the benefit of my own soul? O that such a pious zeal pervaded this whole assembly; and "that there were in all of us such an heart!" To those amongst us in whom any good measure of this grace is found, we would say in the language of St. Paul, "We beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and *to please God*, so ye would abound more and more[d]."

[d] 1 Thess. iv. 1.

## CXCII.

### EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY.

Deut. v. 28, 29. *They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!*

WHEREVER the word of God admits of a literal interpretation, its primary sense ought to be clearly stated, before any spiritual or mystical application be made of it: but when its literal meaning is ascertained, we must proceed to investigate its hidden import, which is frequently the more important. This has been done in relation to the passage before us; which primarily expresses an approbation of the request made by the Jews, that God would speak to them by the mediation of Moses, and not any longer by the

terrific thunders of Mount Sinai; but covertly it conveyed an intimation, that we should all seek deliverance from the curse of the Law through the mediation of that great Prophet, whom God raised up like unto Moses, even his Son Jesus Christ.

The further use which we propose to make of this passage, is only in a way of accommodation; which however is abundantly sanctioned by the example of the Apostles; who not unfrequently adopt the language of the Old Testament to convey their own ideas, even when it has no necessary connexion with their subject. Of course, the Liturgy of our Church was never in the contemplation of the sacred historian: yet, as in that we constantly address ourselves to God, and as it is a composition of unrivalled excellence, and needs only the exercise of our devout affections to render it a most acceptable service before God, we may well apply to it the commendation in our text; "They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!"

As in the course of the month two other occasions of prosecuting our subject will occur, we shall arrange our observations on the Liturgy, so as to vindicate its use—display its excellence—and commend to your attention one particular part, which we conceive to be eminently deserving notice in this place.

In the present Discourse we shall confine ourselves to the vindication of the Liturgy; first, Generally, as a service proper to be used; and then, Particularly, in reference to some objections which are urged against it.

Perhaps there never was any human composition more cavilled at, or less deserving such treatment, than our Liturgy. Nothing has been deemed too harsh to say of it. In order therefore to a *general vindication* of it, we propose to shew, that the use of it is *lawful in itself—expedient for us—and acceptable to God.*

*It is lawful in itself.*

The use of a form of prayer cannot be in itself wrong; for, if it had been, God would not have prescribed the use of forms to the Jewish nation. But

God did prescribe them on several occasions. The words which the priest was to utter in blessing the people of Israel, are thus specified: "Speak unto Aaron, and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace[a]." In like manner, when a man that had been slain was found, inquisition was to be made for his blood; and the elders of the city that was nearest to the body, were to make a solemn affirmation before God, that they knew not who the murderer was, and at the same time *in a set form of prayer* to deprecate the divine displeasure[b]. At the offering of the first-fruits, both at the beginning and end of the service, there were forms of very considerable length, which every offerer was to utter before the Lord[c].

When David brought up the ark from the house of Obed-edom to the tent which he had pitched for it in Jerusalem, he composed a form of prayer and thanksgiving for the occasion, selected out of four different Psalms[d], and put it into the hand of Asaph and his brethren for the use of the whole congregation. In all following ages, the Psalms were used as forms of devotion: Hezekiah appointed them for that purpose when he restored the worship of God, which had been suspended and superseded in the days of Ahaz[e]; as did Ezra also at the laying of the foundation of the second temple[f]. Nay, the hymn which our blessed Lord sang with his disciples immediately after he had instituted his supper as the memorial of his death[g], was either taken from the Psalms, from 113th to 118th inclusive, or else was a particular form composed for that occasion. All

[a] Numb. vi. 23—26. [b] Deut. xxi. 7, 8.
[c] Deut. xxvi. 3, 5—10, 13—15.
[d] Compare 1 Chron. xvi. 7—36. with Ps. cv. 1—15. and xcvi. 1—13. and cxxxvi. 1. and cvi. 47, 48.
[e] 2 Chron. xxix. 30. [f] Ezra iii. 10, 11.
[g] Matt. xxvi. 30.

this sufficiently shews that forms of devotion are not evil in themselves.

But some think, that though they were not evil under the Jewish dispensation, which consisted altogether of rites and carnal ordinances, they are evil under the more spiritual dispensation of the Gospel. This however cannot be; because our blessed Lord taught his disciples a form of prayer, and not only told them to pray *after that manner*, as one Evangelist mentions, but to *use the very words*, as another Evangelist declares. Indeed the word οὕτως, by which St. Matthew expresses it, is not *of necessity* to be confined to manner[h]; it *might* be taken as referring to the very words: but, granting that he speaks of the manner only, and prescribes it as a model; yet St. Luke certainly requires us to use it as a form: "Jesus said unto them, *When ye pray, say*, Our Father which art in heaven[i]." Accordingly we find, from the testimonies of some of the earliest and most eminent Fathers of the Church[k], that it was constantly regarded and used in the Church as a form from the very times of the Apostles. As for the objection, that we do not read in the New Testament that it was so used, it is of no weight at all; for we are not told that the Apostles ever baptized persons in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; but can we therefore doubt whether they did use this form of baptism? Assuredly not; and therefore the circumstance of such an use of the Lord's Prayer not being recorded, especially in so short a history as that of the Apostles, is no argument at all that it was not so used.

Nor was this the only form used in the apostolic age. Lucian, speaking of the first Christians, says, "They spend whole nights in singing of Psalms:" and Pliny, in his famous Letter to Trajan, which was written not much above ten years after the death of John the Evangelist, says of them, "It is their manner

[h] Matt. vi. 9. [i] Luke xi. 2.

[k] Tertullian—Cyprian—Cyril—Jerom—Augustine—Chrysostom—Gregory. See Bennet's *London Cases*, p. 52.

to sing by turns a hymn to Christ as God." This latter, it should seem, was not a Psalm of David, but a hymn composed for the purpose: and it proves indisputably, that even in the apostolic age, forms of devotion were in use. If we come down to the times subsequent to the Apostles, we shall find Liturgies composed for the service of the different Churches. The Liturgies of St. Peter, St. Mark, and St. James, though they were corrupted in later ages, are certainly of high antiquity: that of St. James was of great authority in the Church, in the days of Cyril, who, in his younger years, at the end of the third or beginning of the fourth century, wrote a Comment upon it. And it were easy to trace the use of them from that time even to the present day. Shall it be said, then, that the use of a pre-composed form of prayer is not lawful? Would God have given so many forms under the Jewish dispensation, and would our blessed Lord have given a form for the use of his Church and people, if it had not been lawful to use a form? But it is worthy of observation, that those who most loudly decry the use of forms, do themselves use forms, whenever they unite in public worship. What are hymns, but forms of prayer and praise? and if it be lawful to worship God in forms of verse, is it not equally so in forms of prose? We may say therefore, our adversaries themselves being judges, that the use of a form of prayer is lawful.

As for those passages of Scripture which are supposed to hold forth an expectation that under the Gospel we should have ability to pray without a form; for instance, that "God would give us a spirit of grace and of supplication," and that "the Spirit should help our infirmities, and teach us what to pray for as we ought;" they do not warrant us to expect, that we shall be enabled to speak by inspiration, as the Apostles did, but that our hearts should be disposed for prayer, and be enabled to enjoy near and intimate communion with God in that holy exercise: but they may be fulfilled to us as much in the

use of a pre-composed form, as in any extemporaneous effusions of our own: and it is certain, that persons may be very fluent in the expressions of prayer without the smallest spiritual influence upon their minds; and that they may, on the other hand, be very fervent in prayer, though the expressions be already provided to their hand: and consequently, the promised assistance of the Spirit is perfectly consistent with the use of prayers that have been pre-composed.

But the lawfulness of forms of prayer is in this day pretty generally conceded. Many however still question their expediency. We proceed therefore to shew next, that the use of the Liturgy is *expedient for us.*

Here let it not be supposed that I am about to condemn those who differ from us in judgment or in practice. The legislature has liberally conceded to all the subjects of the realm a right of choice; and God forbid that any one should wish to abridge them of it, in a matter of such high concern as the worship of Almighty God. If any think themselves more edified by extempore prayer, we rejoice that their souls are benefited, though it be not precisely in our way: but still we cannot be insensible to the advantages which we enjoy; and much less can we concede, to any, that the use of a prescribed form of prayer is the smallest disadvantage.

We say, then, that the Liturgy was of great use *at the time it was made.* At the commencement of the Reformation, the most lamentable ignorance prevailed throughout the land: and even those who from their office ought to have been well instructed in the Holy Scriptures, themselves needed to be taught what were the first principles of the oracles of God. If then the pious and venerable Reformers of our Church had not provided a suitable form of prayer, the people would still in many thousands of parishes have remained in utter darkness; but by the diffusion of this sacred light throughout the land, every part of the kingdom became in a good

measure irradiated with scriptural knowledge, and with saving truth. The few who were enlightened, might indeed have scattered some partial rays around them; but their light would have been only as a meteor, that passes away and leaves no permanent effect. Moreover, if their zeal and knowledge and piety had been suffered to die with them, we should have in vain sought for compositions of equal excellence from any set of governors, from that day to the present hour: but by conveying to posterity the impress of their own piety in stated forms of prayer, they have in them transmitted a measure of their own spirit, which, like Elijah's mantle, has descended on multitudes who have succeeded them in their high office. It is not possible to form a correct estimate of the benefit which we at this day derive from having such a standard of piety in our hands: but we do not speak too strongly if we say, that the most enlightened amongst us, of whatever denomination they may be, owe much to the existence of our Liturgy; which has been, as it were, the pillar and ground of the truth in this kingdom, and has served as fuel to perpetuate the flame, which the Lord himself, at the time of the Reformation, kindled upon our altars.

But we must go further, and say, that the use of the Liturgy is *equally expedient still.* Of course, we must not be understood as speaking of private prayer in the closet; where, though a young and inexperienced person may get help from written forms, it is desirable that every one should learn to express his own wants in his own language; because no written prayer can enter so minutely into his wants and feelings as he himself may do: but, in public, we maintain, that the use of such a form as ours is still as expedient as ever. To lead the devotions of a congregation in extempore prayer is a work for which but few are qualified. An extensive knowledge of the Scriptures must be combined with fervent piety, in order to fit a person for such an undertaking: and I greatly mistake, if there be found an humble person

in the world, who, after engaging often in that arduous work, does not wish at times that he had a suitable form prepared for him. That the constant repetition of the same form does not so forcibly arrest the attention as new sentiments and expressions would do, must be confessed: but, on the other hand, the use of a well-composed form secures us against the dry, dull, tedious repetitions which are but too frequently the fruits of extemporaneous devotions. Only let any person be in a devout frame, and he will be far more likely to have his soul elevated to heaven by the Liturgy of the Established Church, than he will by the generality of prayers which he would hear in other places of worship: and, if any one complain that he cannot enter into the spirit of them, let him only examine his frame of mind when engaged in extemporaneous prayers, whether in public, or in his own family; and he will find, that his formality is not confined to the service of the Church, but is the sad fruit and consequence of his own weakness and corruption.

Here it may not be amiss to rectify the notions which are frequently entertained of spiritual edification. Many, if their imaginations are pleased, and their spirits elevated, are ready to think, that they have been greatly edified: and this error is at the root of that preference which they give to extempore prayer, and the indifference which they manifest towards the prayers of the Established Church. But real edification consists in humility of mind, and in being led to a more holy and consistent walk with God: and one atom of such a spirit is more valuable than all the animal fervour that ever was excited. It is with *solid truths*, and not with *fluent words*, that we are to be impressed: and if we can desire from our hearts the things which we pray for in our public forms, we need never regret, that our fancy was not gratified, or our animal spirits raised, by the delusive charms of novelty.

In what we have spoken on this subject, it must be remembered that we have spoken only in a way

of vindication: the true, the exalted, and the proper ground for a member and minister of the Established Church, we have left for the present untouched, lest we should encroach upon that which we hope to occupy on a future occasion. But it remains for us yet further to remark, that the use of our Liturgy is *acceptable to God.*

The words of our text are sufficient to shew us, that God does not look at fine words and fluent expressions, but at the heart. The Israelites had "well said all that they had spoken:" but whilst God acknowledged that, he added, "O that there were such *an heart* in them!" If there be humility and contrition in our supplications, it will make no difference with God, whether they be extemporaneous or pre-composed. Can any one doubt whether, if we were to address our heavenly Father in the words which Christ himself has taught us, we should be accepted of him, provided we uttered the different petitions from our hearts? As little doubt then is there that in the use of the Liturgy also we shall be accepted, if only we draw nigh to God with our hearts as well as with our lips. The prayer of faith, whether with or without a form, shall never go forth in vain. And there are thousands at this day who can attest from their own experience, that they have often found God as present with them in the use of the public services of our Church, as ever they have in their secret chambers.

Thus we have endeavoured to vindicate the use of our Liturgy *generally.* We now come to vindicate it in reference to some particular objections that have been urged against it.

The objections may be comprised under two heads; namely, That there are exceptionable expressions in the Liturgy; and, That the use of it necessarily generates formality.

To notice all the expressions which captious men have cavilled at, would be a waste of time. But there are one or two, which, with tender minds, have considerable weight, and have not only prevented many

worthy men from entering into the Church, but do at this hour press upon the consciences of many, who in all other things approve and admire the public formularies of our Church. A great portion of this present assembly are educating with a view to the ministry in the Establishment; and, if I may be able in any little measure to satisfy their minds, or to remove a stumbling-block out of their way, I shall think that I have made a good use of the opportunity which is thus afforded me. A more essential service I can scarcely render unto any of my younger brethren, or indeed to the Establishment itself, than by meeting fairly the difficulties which occur to their minds, and which are too often successfully urged by the enemies of our Church, to the embarrassing of conscientious minds, and to the drawing away of many, who might have laboured comfortably and successfully in this part of our Lord's vineyard.

There is one circumstance in the formation of our Liturgy, which is not sufficiently adverted to. The persons who composed it were men of a truly apostolic spirit: unfettered by party prejudices, they endeavoured to speak in all things precisely as the Scriptures speak: they did not indulge in speculations and metaphysical reasonings; nor did they presume to be wise above what is written: they laboured to speak the truth, the whole truth, in love: and they cultivated in the highest degree that candour, that simplicity, and that charity, which so eminently characterize all the apostolic writings. Permit me to call your attention particularly to this point, because it will satisfactorily account for those expressions which seem most objectionable; and will shew precisely in what view we may most conscientiously repeat the language they have used.

In our Burial Service, we thank God for delivering our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world, and express a sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, together with a hope also that our departed brother rests in Christ. Of course,

it often happens, that we are called to use these expressions over persons who, there is reason to fear, have died in their sins; and then the question is, How we can with propriety use them? I answer, that, even according to the letter of the words, the use of them may be justified; because we speak not of *his*, but of *the*, resurrection to eternal life; and because, where we do not absolutely *know* that God has *not* pardoned a person, we may entertain *some* measure of hope that he *has*. But, taking the expressions more according to the spirit of them, they precisely accord with what we continually read in the epistles of St. Paul. In the First Epistle to the Corinthian Church, he says of them, "I thank my God always on your behalf, that in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that *ye come behind in no gift*, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Yet, does he instantly begin to condemn the same persons, for their divisions and contentions; and afterwards tells them, "that they were carnal, and walked, not as saints, but as men," that is, as unconverted and ungodly men[l]. In like manner, in his Epistle to the Philippians, after saying, "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," he adds, "Even as it is meet for me to think this of you *all*[m]." Yet does he afterwards caution these very persons against strife, and vain-glory, and self-love; and tell them, that he will send Timothy to them shortly, in order to make inquiries into their state, and to give him information respecting them: and he even mentions two by name, Euodias and Syntyche, whose notorious disagreements he was desirous to heal.

A multitude of other passages might be cited to the same effect; to shew that the Apostles, in a

[l] 1 Cor. i. 4—7. and iii. 3. [m] Phil. i. 3—7.

spirit of candour and of love, spoke in terms of commendation respecting all, when in strictness of speech they should have made some particular exceptions. And, if we at this day were called to use the same language under the very same circumstances, it is probable that many would feel scruples respecting it, and especially, *in thanking God* for things, which, if pressed to the utmost meaning of the words, might not be strictly true. But surely, *if the Apostles in a spirit of love and charity used such language, we may safely and properly do the same: and knowing in what manner, and with what views, they spake, we need not hesitate to deliver ourselves with the same spirit, and in the same latitude, as they*[n].

In the Baptismal Service, we thank God for having regenerated the baptized infant by his Holy Spirit. Now from hence it appears that, in the opinion of our Reformers, regeneration and remission of sins did accompany baptism. But in what sense did they hold this sentiment? Did they maintain that there was no need for the seed then sown in the heart of the baptized person to grow up, and to bring forth fruit; or that he could be saved in any other way than by a progressive renovation of his soul after the divine image? Had they asserted or countenanced any such doctrine as that, it would have been impossible for any enlightened person to concur with them. But nothing can be conceived more repugnant to their sentiments than such an idea as this: so far from harbouring such a thought, they have, and that too in this very prayer, taught us to look unto God for that total change both of heart and life, which, long since *their* days, has begun to

[n] To guard against a misapprehension of his meaning, the author wishes these words to be distinctly noticed; because they contain the whole drift of his argument.—He does not mean to say, that the Apostles ascribed salvation to the *opus operatum*, the outward act of baptism; or, that they intended to assert distinctly the salvation of every individual who had been baptized; but only that, in reference to these subjects, they did use a language very similar to that in our Liturgy, and that therefore our Reformers were justified, as we also are, in using the same.

be expressed by the term Regeneration. After thanking God for regenerating the infant by his Holy Spirit, we are taught to pray, "that he, being dead unto sin, and living unto righteousness, may crucify the old man, and *utterly abolish the whole body of sin*:" and then declaring that total change to be the necessary mean of his obtaining salvation, we add, "*So that* finally, with the residue of thy holy Church, *he may be* an inheritor of thine everlasting kingdom." Is there, I would ask, any person that can require more than this? or does God in his word require more? There are two things to be noticed in reference to this subject; the *term*, Regeneration, and the *thing*. The *term* occurs but twice in the Scriptures; in one place it refers to baptism, and is distinguished from the renewing of the Holy Ghost; which however is represented as attendant on it: and in the other place it has a totally distinct meaning unconnected with the subject. Now the *term* they use, as the Scripture uses it; and the *thing* they require, as strongly as any person can require it. They do not give us any reason to imagine that an adult person can be saved without experiencing all that modern divines have included in the term Regeneration; on the contrary, they do, both there and throughout the whole Liturgy, insist upon the necessity of a radical change both of heart and life. Here, then, the only question is, not, whether a baptized person can be saved by that ordinance without sanctification; but, whether God does always accompany the sign with the thing signified? Here is certainly room for difference of opinion: but it cannot be positively decided in the negative; because we cannot know, or even judge, respecting it, in any instance whatever, except by the fruits that follow: and therefore in all fairness it may be considered only as a doubtful point: and, if we appeal, as we ought to do, to the Holy Scriptures, they certainly do in a very remarkable way accord with the expressions in our Liturgy. St. Paul says, "By one Spirit are we *all* baptized into one

body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been *all* made to *drink into one Spirit:*" and this he says of all the *visible* members of Christ's body[o]. Again, speaking of the whole nation of Israel, infants as well as adults, he says, "They were all baptized unto Moses, in the cloud, and in the sea; and did *all* eat the same *spiritual* meat; and did *all* drink the same *spiritual* drink; for they drank of that *Spiritual* Rock that followed them: and *that Rock was Christ*[p]." Yet behold, in the very next verse he tells us, that "with many of them God was displeased, and overthrew them in the wilderness." In another place he speaks yet more strongly still: "As many of you," says he, "as are baptized into Christ, *have put on Christ*[q]." Here we see what is meant by the expression "baptized into Christ:" it is precisely the same expression as that before mentioned, of the Israelites being "baptized unto Moses;" (the preposition εἰς is used in both places;) it includes all that had been initiated into his religion by the rite of baptism: and of them universally does the Apostle say, "*They have put on Christ.*" Now I ask, Have not the persons who scruple the use of that prayer in the Baptismal Service, equal reason to scruple the use of these different expressions?

Again—St. Peter says, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you for the remission of sins[r];" and in another place, "Baptism doth now save us[s]." And speaking elsewhere of baptized persons who were unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, he says, "He hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins[t]." Does not this very strongly countenance the idea which our Reformers entertained, That the remission of our sins, as well as the regeneration of our souls, is an attendant on the baptismal rite? Perhaps it will be said, that the inspired writers spake of persons who had been baptized at an adult age. But, if they did so in some

[o] 1 Cor. xii. 13—27. [p] 1 Cor. x. 1—4. [q] Gal. iii. 27.
[r] Acts ii. 38, 39. [s] 1 Pet. iii. 21. [t] 2 Pet. i. 9.

places, they certainly did not in others; and, where they did not, they must be understood as comprehending all, whether infants or adults: and therefore the language of our Liturgy, which is not a whit stronger than theirs, may be both subscribed and used without any just occasion of offence.

Let me then speak the truth before God: Though I am no Arminian, I do think that the refinements of Calvin have done great harm in the Church: they have driven multitudes from the plain and popular way of speaking used by the inspired writers, and have made them unreasonably and unscripturally squeamish in their modes of expression; and I conceive that, the less addicted any person is to systematic accuracy, the more he will accord with the inspired writers, and the more he will approve of the views of our Reformers. I do not mean however to say, that a slight alteration in two or three instances would not be an improvement; since it would take off a burthen from many minds, and supersede the necessity of laboured explanations: but I do mean to say, that there is no such objection to these expressions as to deter any conscientious person from giving his unfeigned assent and consent to the Liturgy altogether, or from using the particular expressions which we have been endeavouring to explain.

The other objection is, That the use of a Liturgy necessarily generates formality.

We have before acknowledged that the repetition of a form is less likely to arrest the attention, than that which is novel: but we by no means concede that it necessarily generates formality: on the contrary, we affirm, that if any person come to the service of the Church with a truly spiritual mind, he will find in our Liturgy what is calculated to call forth the devoutest exercises of his mind, far more than in any of the extemporaneous prayers which he would hear in other places.

We forbear to enter into a fuller elucidation of this point at present, because we should detain you

too long; and we shall have a better opportunity of doing it in our next Discourse. But we would here entreat you all so far to bear this objection in your minds, as to cut off all occasion for it as much as possible, and, by the devout manner of your attendance on the services of the Church, to shew, that though you worship God with a form, you also worship him in spirit and in truth. Dissenters themselves know that the repetition of favourite hymns does not generate formality; and they may from thence learn, that the repetition of our excellent Liturgy is not really open to that objection. But they will judge from what they see amongst us: if they see that the prayers are read amongst us without any devotion, and that those who hear them are inattentive and irreverent during the service, they will not impute these evils to the true and proper cause, but to the Liturgy itself: and it is a fact, that they do from this very circumstance derive great advantage for the weakening of men's attachment to the Established Church, and for the augmenting of their own societies. Surely then it becomes us, who are annually sending forth so many ministers into every quarter of the land, to pay particular attention to this point. I am well aware, that where such multitudes of young men are, it is not possible so to control the inconsiderateness of youth, as to suppress all levity, or to maintain that complete order that might be wished; but I know also, that the ingenuousness of youth is open to conviction upon a subject like this, and that even the strictest discipline upon a point so interwoven with the honour of the Establishment and the eternal interests of their own souls, would, in a little time, meet with a more cordial concurrence than is generally imagined: it would commend itself to their consciences, and call forth, not only their present approbation, but their lasting gratitude: and if those who are in authority amongst us would lay this matter to heart, and devise means for the carrying it into full effect, more would be done

for the upholding of the Establishment, than by ten thousand Discourses in vindication of it; and verily, if but the smallest progress should be made in it, I should think that I had "not laboured in vain, or run in vain."

But let us not so think of the Establishment as to forget our own souls: for, after all, the great question for the consideration of us all is, Whether we ourselves are accepted in the use of these prayers? And here, it is not outward reverence and decorum that will suffice; the heart must be engaged, as well as the lips. It will be to little purpose that God should say, respecting us, "They have well said all that they have spoken," unless he see his own wish also accomplished, "O that there were in them such an heart!" Indeed our prayers will be no more than a solemn mockery, if there be not a correspondence between the words of our lips and the feeling of our own souls: and his answer to us will be, like that to the Jews of old, "Ye hypocrites, in vain do ye worship me." Let all of us then bring our devotions to this test, and look well to it, that, with "the form, we have also the power of godliness." We are too apt to rush into the divine presence without any consciousness of the importance of the work in which we are going to be engaged, or any fear of His majesty, whom we are going to address. If we would prevent formality in the house of God, we should endeavour to carry thither a devout spirit along with us, and guard against the very first incursion of vain thoughts and foolish imaginations. Let us then labour to attain such a sense of our own necessities, and of God's unbounded goodness, as shall produce a fixedness of mind, whenever we draw nigh to God in prayer; and for this end, let us ask of God the gift of his Holy Spirit to help our infirmities: and let us never think that we have used the Liturgy to any good purpose, unless it bring into our bosoms an inward witness of its utility, and a reasonable evidence of our acceptance with God in the use of it.

## CXCIII.

### EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY.

Deut. v. 28, 29. *They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!*

IN our preceding Discourses on this text, we first entered distinctly and fully into its true import, and then applied it, in an accommodated sense, to the Liturgy of our Established Church. The utility of a Liturgy being doubted by many, we endeavoured to vindicate the use of it, as lawful in itself, expedient for us, and acceptable to God. But it is not a mere vindication only which such a composition merits at our hands: the labour bestowed upon it has been exceeding great: our first Reformers omitted nothing that could conduce to the improvement of it: they consulted the most pious and learned of foreign divines, and submitted it to them for their correction: and, since their time, there have been frequent revisions of it, in order that every expression which could be made a subject of cavil, might be amended: by which means, it has been brought to such a state of perfection, as no human composition of equal size and variety can pretend to.

To display its excellence, is the task, which, agreeably to the plan before proposed, is now assigned us; and we enter upon it with pleasure; in the hope, that those who have never yet studied the Liturgy, will learn to appreciate its value; and that all of us may be led to a more thankful and profitable use of it in future.

To judge of the Liturgy aright, we should contemplate, *Its spirituality and purity—Its fulness and suitableness—Its moderation and candour.*

I. Its *spirituality and purity.*

It is well known that the services of the Church of Rome, from whose communion we separated, were full of superstition and error: they taught the people to rest in carnal ordinances, without either

stimulating them to real piety, or establishing them on the foundation which God has laid. They contained, it is true, much that was good; but they were at the same time so filled with ceremonies of man's invention, and with doctrines repugnant to the Gospel, that they tended only to deceive and ruin all who adhered to them. In direct opposition to those services, we affirm, that the whole scope and tendency of our Liturgy is to raise our minds to a holy and heavenly state, and to build us up upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the only foundation of a sinner's hope.

Let us look at the *stated* services of our Church; let us call to mind all that we have heard or uttered, from the Introductory Sentences which were to prepare our minds, to the Dismission Prayer which closes the whole: there is nothing for show, but all for edification and spiritual improvement. Is humility the foundation of true piety? what deep humiliation is expressed in the General Confession, and throughout the Litany; as also in supplicating forgiveness, after every one of the Commandments, for our innumerable violations of them all! Is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ the way appointed for our reconciliation with God? we ask for every blessing solely in his name and for his sake; and with the holy vehemence of importunity, we urge with him the consideration of all that he has done and suffered for us, as our plea for mercy; and, at the Lord's supper, we mark so fully our affiance in his atoning blood, that it is impossible for any one to use those prayers aright, without seeing and feeling that "there is no other name under heaven but his, whereby we can be saved."

The same we may observe respecting the *Occasional* Services of our Church. From our very birth even to the grave, our Church omits nothing that can tend to the edification of its members. At our first introduction into the Church, with what solemnity are we dedicated to God in our Baptismal Service! What pledges does our Church require of our

Sponsors, that we shall be brought up in the true faith and fear of God; and how earnestly does she lead us to pray for a progressive, total, and permanent renovation of our souls! No sooner are we capable of receiving instruction, than she provides for us, and expressly requires that we be well instructed in, a Catechism, so short that it burthens the memory of none, and so comprehensive that it contains all that is necessary for our information at that early period of our life. When once we are taught, by that, to know the nature and extent of our baptismal vows, the Church calls upon us to renew in our own person the vows that were formerly made for us in our name; and, in a service specially prepared for that purpose, leads us to consecrate ourselves to God; thus endeavouring to *confirm* us in our holy resolutions, and to establish us in the faith of Christ. Not content with having thus initiated, instructed, and confirmed her members in the religion of Christ, the Church embraces every occasion of instilling into our minds the knowledge and love of his ways. If we change our condition in life, we are required to come to the altar of our God, and there devote ourselves afresh to him, and implore his blessing, from which alone all true happiness proceeds. Are mercies and deliverances vouchsafed to any, especially that great mercy of preservation from the pangs and perils of childbirth? the Church appoints a public acknowledgment to be made to Almighty God in the presence of the whole congregation, and provides a suitable service for that end. In like manner, for every public mercy, or in time of any public calamity, particular prayers and thanksgivings are provided for our use. In a time of sickness there is also very particular provision made for our instruction and consolation: and even after death, when she can no more benefit the deceased, the Church labours to promote the benefit of her surviving members, by a service the most solemn and impressive that ever was formed. Thus attentive is she to supply in every thing, as far as human

endeavours can avail, our spiritual wants; being decent in her forms, but not superstitious; and strong in her expressions, but not erroneous. In short, it is not possible to read the Liturgy with candour, and not to see that the welfare of our souls is the one object of the whole; and that the compilers of it had nothing in view, but that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in God, we should glorify his holy name.

II. The excellencies of our Liturgy will yet further appear, while we notice, next, its *fulness and suitableness.*

Astonishing is the wisdom with which the Liturgy is adapted to the edification of every member of the Church. There is no case that is overlooked, no sin that is not deplored, no want that is not specified, no blessing that is not asked: yet, whilst every particular is entered into so far that every individual person may find his own case adverted to, and his own wishes expressed, the whole is so carefully worded, that no person is led to express more than he ought to feel, or to deliver sentiments in which he may not join with his whole heart. Indeed there is a minuteness in the petitions that is rarely found even in men's private devotions; and those very particularities are founded in the deepest knowledge of the human heart, and the completest view of men's spiritual necessities: for instance, We pray to God to deliver us, not only in all time of our tribulation, but *in all time of our wealth also;* because we are quite as much in danger of being drawn from God by prosperity, as by adversity; and need his aid as much in the one as in the other.

In the intercessory part of our devotions also, our sympathy is called forth in behalf of all orders and degrees of men, under every name and every character that can be conceived. We pray to him, to strengthen *such as do stand,* to comfort and help *the weak-hearted,* and to raise up *them that fall,* and finally, to beat down Satan under our feet. We entreat him also to succour, help, and comfort *all that are in*

*danger, necessity, and tribulation.* We further supplicate him in behalf of *all that travel,* whether *by land or by water,* all *women labouring of child,* all *sick persons,* and *young children,* and particularly entreat him to have pity upon all *prisoners* and *captives.* Still further, we plead with him to defend and provide for the *fatherless children,* and *widows,* and *all that are desolate and oppressed:* and, lest any should have been omitted, we beg him "to have mercy upon *all men,*" generally, and more particularly, "to forgive our *enemies, persecutors,* and *slanderers,* and to turn their hearts." In what other prayers, whether extemporaneous or written, shall we ever find such diffusive benevolence as this?

In a word, there is no possible situation in which we can be placed, but the prayers are precisely suited to us; nor can we be in any frame of mind, wherein they will not express our feelings as strongly and forcibly, as any person could express them even in his secret chamber. Take a broken-hearted penitent; where can he ever find words, wherein to supplicate the mercy of his God, more congenial with his feelings than in the Litany, where he renews his application to each Person of the Sacred Trinity for mercy, under the character of a miserable sinner? Hear him when kneeling before the altar of his God: "Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men; we acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burthen of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father! For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past, and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life, to the honour and glory of thy Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

I may venture to say that no finite wisdom could suggest words more suited to the feelings or necessities of a penitent, than these.

Take, next, a person full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; and if he were the devoutest of all the human race, he could never find words, wherein to give scope to all the exercises of his mind, more suitable than in the *Te Deum:* "We praise thee, O God: we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud, the Heavens, and all the Powers therein: To thee Cherubin and Seraphin continually do cry, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and earth are full of the Majesty of thy Glory."—Hear him also at the table of the Lord: "It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God: Therefore with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of thy glory: Glory be to thee, O Lord most High."

Even where there are no particular exercises of the mind, the Liturgy is calculated to produce the greatest possible good: for the gravity and sobriety of the whole service are fitted to impress the most careless sinner; whilst the various portions of Scripture that are read out of the Old and New Testament, not only for the Lessons of the day, but from the Psalms also, and from the Epistles and Gospels, are well adapted to arrest the attention of the thoughtless, and to convey instruction to the most ignorant. Indeed I consider it as one of the highest excellencies of our Liturgy, that it is calculated to make us wise, intelligent, and sober Christians: it marks a golden mean; it affects and inspires a meek, humble, modest, sober piety, equally remote from the unmeaning coldness of a formalist, the self-importance of a systematic dogmatist, and the unhallowed fervour of a

wild enthusiast. A *tender seriousness*, a *meek devotion*, and an *humble joy*, are the qualities which it was intended, and is calculated, to produce in all her members.

III. It remains that we yet further trace the excellence of our Liturgy, in its *moderation and candour*.

The whole Christian world has from time to time been agitated with controversies of different kinds; and human passions have grievously debased the characters and actions even of good men in every age. But it should seem that the compilers of our Liturgy were inspired with a wisdom and moderation peculiar to themselves. They kept back no truth whatever, through fear of giving offence; yet were careful so to state every truth, as to leave those inexcusable who should recede from the Church on account of any sentiments which she maintained. In this, they imitated the inspired penmen; who do not dwell on doctrines after the manner of human systems, but introduce them incidentally, as it were, as occasion suggests, and bring them forward always in connexion with practical duties. The various perfections of God are all stated in different parts; but all in such a way, as, without affording any occasion for dispute, tends effectually to encourage us in our addresses to him. The Godhead of Christ is constantly asserted, and different prayers are expressly addressed to him; but nothing is said in a way of contentious disputation. The influences of the Holy Spirit, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed, are stated; and "the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is sought, in order that we may perfectly love God, and worthily magnify his holy Name:" but all is conveyed in a way of humble devotion, without reflections upon others, or even a word that can lead the thoughts to controversy of any kind. Even the deepest doctrines of our holy religion are occasionally brought forth in a practical view (in which view alone they ought to be regarded;) that, whilst we contemplate them as truths, we may experience their sanctifying efficacy

on our hearts. The truth, the whole truth, is brought forward, without fear; but it is brought forward also without offence: all is temperate; all is candid; all is practical; all is peaceful; and every word is spoken in love. This is an excellency that deserves particular notice, because it is so contrary to what is found in the worship of those whose addresses to the Most High God depend on the immediate views and feelings of an individual person, which may be, and not unfrequently are, tinctured in a lamentable degree by party views and unhallowed passions. And we shall do well to bear in mind this excellency, in order that we may imitate it; and that we may shew to all, that the moderation which so eminently characterizes the Offices of our Church, is no less visible in all her members.

Sorry should I be, when speaking on this amiable virtue, to transgress it even in the smallest degree: but I appeal to all who hear me, whether there be not a want of this virtue in the temper of the present times; and whether if our Reformers themselves were to rise again and live amongst us, their pious sentiments and holy lives would not be, with many, an occasion of offence? I need not repeat the terms which are used to stigmatize those who labour to walk in their paths; nor will I speak of the jealousies which are entertained against those, who live only to inculcate what our Reformers taught. You need not be told that even the moderate sentiments of our Reformers are at this day condemned by many as dangerous errors; and the very exertions, whereby alone the knowledge of them can be communicated unto men, are imputed to vanity, and loaded with blame. But, though I thus speak, I must acknowledge, to the glory of God, that in no place have moderation and candour shone more conspicuous, than in this distinguished seat of literature and science: and I pray God, that the exercise of these virtues may be richly recompensed from the Lord into every bosom, and be followed with all the other graces that accompany salvation.

From this view of our subject it will be naturally asked, Do I then consider the Liturgy as altogether perfect? I answer, No: it is a human composition; and there is nothing human that can claim so high a title as that of absolute perfection. There are certainly some few expressions which might be altered for the better, and which in all probability would have been altered at the Conference which was appointed for the last revision of it, if the unreasonable scrupulosity of some, and the unbending pertinacity of others, had not defeated the object of that assembly. I have before mentioned two, which, though capable of being vindicated, might admit of some improvement. And, as I have been speaking strongly of the moderation and candour of the Liturgy, I will here bring forward the only exception to it that I am aware of; and that is found in the Athanasian Creed. The damnatory clauses contained in that Creed, do certainly breathe a very different spirit from that which pervades every other part of our Liturgy. As to the doctrine of the Creed, it is perfectly sound, and such as ought to be universally received. But it is matter of regret that any should be led to pronounce a sentence of damnation against their fellow-creatures, in any case where God himself has not clearly and certainly pronounced it. Yet whilst I say this, permit me to add, that I think this Creed does not express, nor ever was intended to express, so much as is generally supposed. The part principally objected to, is that whole statement, which is contained between the first assertion of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the other articles of our faith: and the objection is, that the damnatory clauses which would be justifiable, if confined to the general assertion respecting the doctrine of the Trinity, become unjustifiable, when extended to the whole of that which is annexed to it. But, if we suppose that this intermediate part was intended as an *explanation* of the doctrine in question, we still, I think, ought not to be understood as affirming respecting that explanation all that we affirm respecting

the doctrine itself. If any one will read the Athanasian Creed with attention, he will find three damnatory clauses; one at the beginning, which is confined to the general doctrine of the Trinity; another at the close of what, for argument sake, we call the explanation of that doctrine; and another at the end, relating to the other articles of the Creed, such as the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, and his coming at the last day to judge the world. Now, whoever will compare the three clauses, will find a marked difference between them: those which relate to the general doctrine of the Trinity, and to the other articles of the Creed, are strong; asserting positively that the points must be *believed,* and that too on *pain of everlasting damnation:* but that which is annexed to the *explanation* of the doctrine, asserts only, that a man who is in earnest about his salvation *ought* to *think* thus of the Trinity. The words in the original are, Qui *vult* ergo salvus esse, *ita* de Trinitate *sentiat:* and this shews in what sense we are to understand the more ambiguous language of our translation: "He therefore that *will* be saved, (i. e. *is willing* or desirous to be saved,) *must* thus think (*let him* thus think) of the Trinity." Thus it appears that the things contained in the beginning and end of the Creed are spoken of as matters of *faith;* but this, which is inserted in the midst, as a matter of *opinion* only: in reference to the first and last parts the certainty of damnation is asserted; but in reference to the intermediate part, nothing is asserted, except that such are the views which we *ought* to entertain of the point in question. Now I would ask, was this difference the effect of chance? or rather, was it not actually intended, in order to guard against the very objection that is here adduced?

This, then, is the answer which we give, on the supposition that the part which appears so objectionable, is to be considered as an *explanation* of the doctrine in question. But what, if it was never intended as an *explanation?* What, if it contains only

a *proof* of that doctrine, and an appeal to our reason, that that doctrine is true? Yet, if we examine the Creed, we shall find this to be the real fact. Let us in few words point out the steps of the argument.

The Creed says, "The Catholic faith is this, That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance:" and then it proceeds, "FOR there is one person of the Father," and so on; and then, after *proving* the distinct personality of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and their unity in the Godhead, it adds, "So THAT in all things as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity, is to be worshipped. He THEREFORE that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity." Here are all the distinct parts of an argument. The position affirmed—the proofs adduced—the deduction made—and the conclusion drawn in reference to the importance of receiving and acknowledging that doctrine.

From hence, then, I infer, that the damnatory clauses should be understood only in reference to the doctrine affirmed, and not be extended to the parts which are adduced only in confirmation of it: and, if we believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is a fundamental article of the Christian faith, we may without any breach of charity apply to that doctrine what our Lord spake of the Gospel at large, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."

Thus, in either view, the use of the Creed may be vindicated: for, if we consider the obnoxious part as *an explanation*, the terms requiring it to be received are intentionally softened; and if we consider it as *a proof*, it is to the doctrines proved, and not to the proof annexed, that the damnatory clauses are fairly applicable.

Still, after all, I confess, that if the same candour and moderation that are observable in all other parts of the Liturgy had been preserved here, it would have been better. For though I do verily believe,

that those who deny the doctrine of the Trinity are in a fatal error, and will find themselves so at the day of judgment, I would rather deplore the curse that awaits them, than denounce it; and rather weep over them in my secret chamber, than utter anathemas against them in the house of God.

I hope I have now met the question of our Liturgy fairly. I have not confined myself to general assertions, but have set forth the difficulties which are supposed to exist against it, and have given such a solution of them as I think is sufficient to satisfy any conscientious mind: though it is still matter of regret that any laboured explanation of them should be necessary.

Now then, acknowledging that our Liturgy is not absolutely perfect, and that those who most admire it would be glad if these few blemishes were removed; have we not still abundant reason to be thankful for it? Let its excellencies be fairly weighed, and its blemishes will sink into nothing; let its excellencies be duly appreciated, and every person in the kingdom will acknowledge himself deeply indebted to those, who with so much care and piety compiled it.

But these blemishes *alone* are seen by multitudes; and its excellencies are altogether forgotten: yea, moreover, frequent occasion is taken from these blemishes to persuade men to renounce their communion with the Established Church, in the hopes of finding a purer worship elsewhere. With what justice such arguments are urged, will best appear by a comparison between the prayers that are offered elsewhere, and those that are offered in the Established Church. There are about eleven thousand places of worship in the Established Church, and about as many out of it. Now take the prayers that are offered on any Sabbath in all places out of the Establishment; have them all written down, and every expression sifted and scrutinized as our Liturgy has been: then compare them with the prayers that have been offered in all the churches of the kingdom;

and see what comparison the extemporaneous effusions will bear with our pre-composed forms. Having done this for *one Sabbath*, proceed to do it for *a year;* and then, after a similar examination, compare them again: were this done, (and done it ought to be in order to form a correct judgment on the case,) methinks there is scarcely a man in the kingdom that would not fall down on his knees, and bless God for the Liturgy of the Established Church.

All that is wanting is, *an heart suited to the Liturgy*, and cast as it were into that mould. It may with truth be said of us, "They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were in them such an heart!" Let us only suppose that on any particular occasion there were in all of us such a state of mind as the Liturgy is suited to express; what glorious worship would ours be! and how certainly would God delight to hear and bless us! We will not say that he would come down and fill the house with his visible glory, as he did in the days of Moses and of Solomon; but we will say, that he would come down and fill our souls with such a sense of his presence and love, as would transform us into his blessed image, and constitute a very heaven upon earth. Let each of us, then, adopt the wish in our text, and say, "O that there *may be* in *me* such an heart!" Let us cultivate the *moderation and candour* which are there exhibited; divesting ourselves of all prejudice against religion, and receiving with impartial readiness the whole counsel of our God. More particularly, whenever we come up to the house of God, let us seek those very dispositions in the use of the Liturgy, which our Reformers exercised in the framing of it. Let us bring with us into the presence of our God that *spirituality of mind* that shall fit us for communion with him, and that *purity of heart* which is the commencement of the divine image on the soul. Let us study, whenever we join in the different parts of this Liturgy, to get our hearts *suitably impressed* with the work in which we are engaged; that our confessions may be humble,

our petitions fervent, our thanksgivings devout, and our whole souls obedient to the word we hear. In a word, let us not be satisfied with any attainments, but labour to be holy as God himself is holy, and perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect. If now a doubt remain on the mind of any individual respecting the transcendent excellence of the Liturgy, let him only take the Litany, and go through every petition of it attentively, and at the close of every petition ask himself, What sort of a person should I be, if this petition were so answered to me, that I lived henceforth according to it? and what kind of a world would this be, if all the people that were in it experienced the same answer, and walked according to the same model? If, for instance, we were all from this hour delivered "from all blindness of heart; from pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness;" if we were delivered also "from all other deadly sin, and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil;" what happiness should we not possess? How happy would *the Church* be, if it should "please God to illuminate all bishops, priests, and deacons, with true knowledge and understanding of his word, so that both by their preaching and living they set it forth and shew it accordingly!" How blessed also would *the whole nation* be, if it pleased God to "endue the lords of the council, and all the nobility, with grace, wisdom, and understanding: and to bless and keep the magistrates, giving them grace to execute justice and to maintain truth; and further to bless all his people throughout the land!" Yea, what *a world* would this be, if from this moment God should "give to all nations, unity, peace, and concord!" Were these prayers once answered, we should hear no more complaints of our Liturgy, nor ever wish for any thing *in public*, better than that which is provided for us. May God hasten forward that happy day, when all the assemblies of his people throughout the land shall enter fully into the spirit of these prayers,

and be answered in the desire of their hearts; receiving from him an "increase of grace, to hear meekly his word, to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit!" And to us in particular may he give, even to every individual amongst us, "true repentance; and forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances; and endue us with the grace of his Holy Spirit, that we may amend our lives according to his holy word." Amen and Amen.

## CXCIV.

### EXCELLENCY OF THE LITURGY.

Deut. v. 28, 29. *They have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them!*

THE further we proceed in the investigation of our Liturgy, the more we feel the difficulty of doing justice to it. Such is the spirit which it breathes throughout, that if only a small measure of its piety existed in all the different congregations in which it is used, we should be as holy and as happy a people as ever the Jews were in the most distinguished periods of their history. If this object has not been yet attained, it is not the fault of our Reformers: they have done all that men could do, to transmit to the latest posterity the blessings which they themselves had received: and there is not a member of our Church, who has not reason to bless God, every day of his life, for their labours. But they knew that it would be to little purpose to provide suitable forms of prayer for every different occasion, if they did not also secure, as far as human wisdom could secure, a succession of men, who, actuated by the same ardent piety as themselves, should perform the different offices to the greatest advantage, and carry on by their personal ministrations the blessed work which *they* had begun. Here therefore they bestowed the utmost care; marking with precision what were the qualifications requisite for the ministerial office, and

binding, in the most solemn manner, all who should be consecrated to it, to a diligent and faithful discharge of their respective duties.

When we first spake of the Liturgy, we proposed, after vindicating its use, and displaying its excellency, to direct your attention to one particular part, which on that account we should reserve for a distinct and fuller consideration. The part we had in view was, The Ordination Service. We are aware, indeed, that in calling your attention so particularly to that, we stand on delicate ground: but, being aware of it, we shall take the greater care that no one shall have reason to complain of want of delicacy. It is the candour that has invariably manifested itself in this congregation, that emboldens me to bring this subject before you. Any attempt to discuss the merits of the Liturgy would indeed be incomplete, if we omitted to notice that part, which so pre-eminently displays its highest excellencies, and is peculiarly appropriate to the audience which I have the honour to address. I trust therefore I shall not be thought assuming, as though I had any pretensions to exalt myself above the least and lowest of my brethren. I well know, that, if my own deficiencies were far less than they are, it would ill become me to take any other than the lowest place; and much more, when I am conscious that they are so great and manifold. For my own humiliation, no less than that of others, I enter on the task; and I pray God, that, whilst I am shewing what our Reformers inculcated as pertaining to the pastoral office, we may all apply the subject to ourselves, and entreat help from God, that, as "we have well said all that we have spoken, so there may be in us such an heart."

There are three things to be noticed in the Ordination Service; our *professions*, our *promises*, and our *prayers*: after considering which, we shall endeavour to excite, in all, that desire, which God has so tenderly, and so affectionately, expressed in our behalf.

Let me begin, then, with calling your attention to the *professions* which we make, when first we become candidates for the ministerial office.

So sacred was the priesthood under the Law, that no man presumed to take it upon himself, but he who was called to it by God, as Aaron was. And though the priesthood of our blessed Lord was of a totally distinct kind from that which shadoweth it forth, "yet did he not glorify himself to be made an High-Priest," but was so constituted by his heavenly Father, who committed to him that office "after the order of Melchizedec." Some call therefore, as from God himself, is to be experienced by all who devote themselves to the service of the sanctuary. Of this our Reformers were convinced: and hence they required the ordaining bishop to put to every candidate that should come before him, this solemn interrogation; "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office?" to which he answers, "I trust so."

Now I am far from intimating that this call, which every candidate for Holy Orders professes to have received, resembles that which was given to the Apostles: it is certainly not to be understood as though it were a voice or suggestion coming directly from the Holy Ghost; for though God *may* reveal his will in this manner, just as he did in the days of old, yet we have no reason to think that he *does*. The motion here spoken of is less perceptible: it does not carry its own evidence along with it; (as did that which in an instant prevailed on the Apostles to forsake their worldly business, and to follow Christ;) but it disposes the mind in a gradual and silent way to enter into the service of God; partly from a sense of obligation to him for his redeeming love, partly from a compassion for the ignorant and perishing multitudes around us, and partly from a desire to be an honoured instrument in the Redeemer's hands to establish and enlarge his kingdom in the world. Less than this cannot reasonably be supposed to be comprehended in that question: and the way to answer it with a good conscience is, to examine ourselves whether we have an eye to our own ease, honour, or preferment; or, whether we have really a love to the

souls of men, and a desire to promote the honour of our God? The question, in this view of it, gives no scope for enthusiasm, nor does it leave any room for doubt upon the mind of him that is to answer it: every man may tell, whether he feels so deeply the value of his own soul, as to be anxious also for the souls of others; and whether, independent of worldly considerations, he has such love to the Lord Jesus Christ, as to desire above all things to advance his glory. These feelings are not liable to be mistaken, because they are always accompanied with corresponding actions, and always productive of appropriate fruits.

Now in all cases where this profession has been made, it may be said, "They have well said all that they have spoken." For this profession is a public acknowledgment that such a call is necessary: and it serves as a barrier to exclude from the sacred office many, who would otherwise have undertaken it from worldly motives. And though it is true, that too many break through this barrier, yet it stands as a witness against them, and in very many instances an effectual witness; testifying to their consciences, that they have come to God with a lie in their right hand, and making them to tremble, lest they should be condemned at the tribunal of their God, for having, like Ananias and Sapphira, lied unto the Holy Ghost. Yes, very many, who have lightly uttered these words when they first entered into the ministry, have been led by them afterwards to examine their motives more attentively, and to humble themselves for the iniquity they have committed, and to surrender up themselves with redoubled energy to the service of their God. Though therefore we regret that any should make this profession on insufficient grounds, we rejoice that it is required of all: and we pray God, that all who have made it, may reconsider it with the attention it deserves; and that all who propose to make it, may pause, till they have maturely weighed the import of their assertion, and can call God himself to attest the truth of it.

Let us next turn our attention to the *promises*, by which we bind ourselves on that occasion.

In the service for the Ordination of Priests, there is an exhortation from the bishop, which every minister would do well to read at least once every year. To give a just view of this part of our Liturgy, we must briefly open to you the contents of that exhortation; the different parts of which are afterwards brought before us in the shape of questions, to every one of which a distinct and solemn answer is demanded, as in the presence of the heart-searching God. The exhortation consists of two parts; in the first of which *we are enjoined to consider the importance of that high office to which we are called;* and in the second, *we are urged to exert ourselves to the uttermost in the discharge of it.*

In reference to the former of these, it speaks thus: "Now we exhort you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you have in remembrance, into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an office and charge, ye are called: that is to say, to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and to premonish, to feed and provide for the Lord's family; to seek for Christ's sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for his children who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ for ever."

Where in such few words can we find so striking a representation of the dignity of our office, as in this address? We are "messengers" from the Most High God, to instruct men in the knowledge of his will, and to communicate to them the glad tidings of salvation through the mediation of his Son: we are "watchmen," to warn them of their danger, whilst they continue without an interest in Christ: and we are "stewards," to superintend his household, and to deal out to every one of his servants, from day to day, whatsoever their respective necessities require. Now, if we occupied such an office in the house of an earthly monarch only, our dignity were great; but to be thus engaged in the service of the King of

kings, is an honour far greater than the temporal government of the whole universe. Should we not, then, bear in mind what an office is devolved upon us?

From speaking thus respecting *the dignity of the ministry*, it proceeds to speak of *the importance of the trust* committed to us: "Have always therefore printed in your remembrance, how great *a treasure* is committed to your charge: for they are the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for whom he shed his blood." The congregation whom you must serve, is "his spouse, and his body." What a tender and affecting representation is here! The souls committed to our care are represented as "the sheep of Christ, which he bought with his death, and for which he shed his blood." What bounds would there be to our exertions, if we considered as we ought, that we are engaged in that very work, for which our Lord Jesus Christ came down from the bosom of his Father, and shed his blood upon the cross; and that to us he looks for the completion of his efforts in the salvation of a ruined world? Further still, they are represented as "the spouse and body of Christ," whose welfare ought to be infinitely dearer to us than life itself. We know what concern men would feel if the life of their own spouse, or of their own body, were in danger, though they could only hope to protract for a few years a frail and perishable existence: what, then, ought we not to feel for "the spouse and body of Christ," whose everlasting welfare is dependent on our exertions!

After thus impressing on our minds the importance of our office, the exhortation proceeds in the next place to urge us to a diligent performance of it. It reminds us, that we are answerable to God for every soul committed to our charge; that there must be no limit to our exertions, except what the capacity of our minds and the strength of our bodies have assigned. It calls upon us to use all the means in our power to qualify ourselves for the discharge of it, by withdrawing ourselves from worldly cares, worldly pleasures, worldly studies, worldly habits and pursuits

of every kind, in order to fix the whole bent of our minds on the study of the Holy Scriptures, and of those things which will assist us in the understanding of them. It directs us to be instant in prayer to God for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, by whose gracious influences alone we shall be enabled to fulfil our duties aright. And, finally, it enjoins us so to regulate our own lives, and so to govern our respective families, that we may be patterns to all around us; and that we may be able to address our congregations in the language of St. Paul, "Whatsoever ye have heard and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you." But it will be satisfactory to you to hear the very words of the exhortation itself: "If it shall happen the same Church, or any member thereof, to take any hurt or hinderance by reason of your negligence, ye know the greatness of the fault, and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. Wherefore consider with yourselves the end of your ministry towards the children of God, towards the spouse and body of Christ; and see that you *never cease your labour, your care and diligence,* until you have done *all that lieth in you,* according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge unto that agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness of life."

"Forasmuch then as your office is both of so great excellency, and of so great difficulty, ye see with how great care and study ye ought to apply yourselves, as well that ye may shew yourselves dutiful and thankful unto that Lord who hath placed you in so high a dignity; as also to beware that neither you yourselves offend, nor be the occasion that others offend. Howbeit ye cannot have a mind and will thereto of yourselves; for that will and ability is given of God alone: therefore ye ought, and have need to pray earnestly for his Holy Spirit. And seeing that you cannot by any other means compass

the doing of so weighty a work, pertaining to the salvation of man, but with doctrine and exhortation taken out of the Holy Scriptures, and with a life agreeable to the same; consider how studious ye ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures, and in framing the manners both of yourselves and of them that specially pertain unto you, according to the rule of the same Scriptures: and for this self-same cause, how ye ought to forsake and set aside (as much as you may) all worldly cares and studies."

Here let us pause a moment, to reflect, what stress our Reformers laid on the Holy Scriptures, as the only sure directory for our faith and practice, and the only certain rule of all our ministrations. They have clearly given it as their sentiment, that to study the word of God ourselves, and to open it to others, is the proper labour of a minister; a labour, that calls for all his time, and all his attention: and, by this zeal of theirs in behalf of the Inspired Volume, they were happily successful in bringing it into general use. But, if they could look down upon us at this time, and see what an unprecedented zeal has pervaded all ranks and orders of men amongst us for the dissemination of that truth, which they, at the expense of their own lives, transmitted to us; how would they rejoice and leap for joy! Yet, methinks, if they cast an eye upon this favoured spot, and saw, that, whilst the Lord Jesus Christ is thus exalted in almost every other place, we are lukewarm in his cause; and whilst thousands all around us are emulating each other in exertions to extend his kingdom through the world, we, who are so liberal on other occasions, have not yet appeared in his favour; they would be ready to rebuke our tardiness, as David did the indifference of Judah, from whom he had reason to expect the most active support; "Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house[a]." But I am persuaded, that there is nothing wanting but that a suitable proposal be

[a] 2 Sam. xix. 11.

made by some person of influence amongst us; and we shall soon approve ourselves worthy sons of those pious ancestors. I would hope there is not an individual amongst us, who would not gladly lend his aid, that "the word of the Lord may run and be glorified," not in this kingdom only, but, if possible, throughout all the earth.

But to return to the bishop's exhortation. "We have good hope that you have well weighed and pondered these things with yourselves long before this time; and that you have clearly determined, by God's grace, to *give yourselves wholly to this office*, whereunto it hath pleased God to call you, so that, as much as lieth in you, you will *apply yourselves wholly* to this one thing, and draw all your cares and studies this way: and that you will continually pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Saviour Jesus Christ, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Ghost; that by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures, ye may wax riper and stronger in your ministry, and that ye may so endeavour yourselves from time to time to sanctify the lives of you and yours, and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ, that ye may be wholesome and godly examples and patterns for the people to follow."

After this, the bishop, calling upon the candidates, in the name of God and of his Church, to give a plain and solemn answer to the questions which he shall propose to them, puts the substance of the exhortation into several distinct questions; two of which only, for brevity sake, we will repeat: "Will you be diligent in prayers, and in reading of the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and the flesh?" To which we answer; "I will endeavour myself so to do, the Lord being my helper." Then he asks again; "Will you be diligent to frame and fashion your own selves and your families according to the doctrine of Christ, and to make both yourselves and them, as much as in you lieth, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?" To

which we answer, "I will apply myself thereto, the Lord being my helper."

These are the promises which we make before God in the most solemn manner at the time of our ordination. Now I would ask, Can any human being entertain a doubt, whether, in making these promises, we have not "well said all that we have spoken?" Can any of us say, that too much has been required of us? Do we not see and feel, that, as the honour of the office is great, so is the difficulty of performing it aright, and the danger of performing it in a negligent and heartless manner? If a man undertake any office that requires indefatigable exertion, and that involves the temporal interests of men to a great extent, we expect of that man the utmost diligence and care. If, then, such be expected of the servants of *men*, where temporal interests only are affected, what must be expected of the servants of *God*, where the eternal interests of men, and the everlasting honour of God, are so deeply concerned? I say again, We cannot but approve the promises we have made; and, methinks, God himself, when he heard our vows, expressed his approbation of them, saying, "They have well said all that they have spoken."

We come, lastly, to mention our *prayers*, which were offered to God on that occasion.

And here we have one of the most pious and affecting institutions that ever was established upon earth. The bishop, who during the preceding exhortation and questions has been seated in his chair, now rises up, and in a standing posture makes his earnest supplication to God in behalf of all the candidates, in these words: "Almighty God, who hath given you this will to do all these things, grant also unto you strength and power to perform the same; that he may accomplish his work which he has begun in you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." After this a request is made to the whole congregation then present, to offer up their prayers in secret to God, and to make their supplications to God for

all these things. And, that they may have time to do so, it is appointed, that *silence shall be kept for a space;* the public services being for a while suspended, in order to give the congregation an opportunity of pouring out their souls before God in behalf of the persons who are to be ordained.

What an idea does this give us of the sanctity of our office, and of the need we have of divine assistance for the performance of it! and how beautifully does it intimate to the people, the interest they have in an efficient ministry! Surely, if they felt, as they ought, their need of spiritual instruction, they would never discontinue their prayers for those who are placed over them in the Lord, but would plead in their behalf night and day.

After a sufficient time has been allowed for these private devotions, a hymn to the Holy Ghost is introduced; *(the candidates all continuing in a kneeling posture;)* a hymn which, in beauty of composition and spirituality of import, cannot easily be surpassed. Time will not allow me to make any observations upon it; but it would be a great injustice to our Liturgy, if I should omit to recite it: and it will be a profitable employment, if, whilst we recite it, we all adopt it as expressing our own desires, and add our Amen to every petition contained in it.

"Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire!
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
Who dost thy seven-fold gifts impart;
Thy blessed unction from above
Is comfort, life, and fire of love.
Enable with perpetual light
The dulness of our blinded sight;
Anoint and cheer our soiled face
With the abundance of thy grace;
Keep far our foes, give peace at home!
Where thou art Guide, no ill can come.
Teach us to know the Father, Son,
And Thee, of both, to be but One;
That through the ages all along,
This may be our endless song,—
Praise to Thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!"

In this devout hymn the agency of the Holy Spirit, as the one source of light, and peace, and holiness, is fully acknowledged, and earnestly sought as the necessary means of forming pastors after God's heart: and it is well entitled to the encomium which has been already so often mentioned, "They have well said all that they have spoken."

Passing over the remaining prayers, we conclude this part of our subject with observing, that no sooner is the imposition of hands finished, and the commission given to the candidates to preach the Gospel, than the newly ordained consecrate themselves to God at his table; and seal, as it were, their vows, by partaking of the body and blood of Christ; into whose service they have been just admitted, and whom they have sworn to serve with their whole hearts.

Thus far then "all is well said;" and if our hearts be in unison with our words, verily we shall have reason to bless God to all eternity. "O that there *were* in us such an heart!"

Glad should I be, if your time would admit of it, to set forth at considerable length the benefits that would accrue from a conformity of heart in us to all that has been before stated: but the indulgence with which I have hitherto been favoured must not be abused. I shall therefore close the subject with only two reflections, illustrative of the wish contained in the text.

First, if such an heart were in us, *how happy should we be in our souls!* Men may be so thoughtless, as to cast off all concern about futurity, and to say, "I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart." But, if once we begin to indulge any serious reflections, we cannot avoid thinking of our responsibility on account of the souls committed to our charge. *Then*, if we bring to mind that solemn declaration of God, that "the souls of our people shall be required at our hands," we must of necessity tremble for our state. The concerns of *our own* souls are of more weight than all other things in the world; and the thought of perishing under the weight

of *our own* personal transgressions is inexpressibly awful: but the thought of perishing under the guilt of destroying *hundreds and thousands* of immortal souls, is so shocking, that it cannot be endured: if once admitted into the mind, it will fill us with consternation and terror; and the excuses which now appear so satisfactory to us, will vanish like smoke. We shall not then think it sufficient to have fulfilled our duties by proxy; since others can but perform their own duties; nor can any diligence of theirs ever justify our neglect: having sworn for ourselves, we must execute for ourselves; nor ever be satisfied with committing that trust to others, which at the bar of judgment we must give account of for ourselves. Nor shall we then think it sufficient to plead, that we have other engagements, which interfere with the discharge of our ministerial duties; unless we can be assured, that God will wave his claims upon us, and acknowledge the labours which we have undertaken for our temporal advantage, more important than those which respect his honour, and man's salvation. On the other hand, if we have the testimony of our own consciences, that we have endeavoured faithfully to perform our ordination vows, and to execute, though with much imperfection, the work assigned us, we shall lift up our heads with joy. Matter for deep humiliation, indeed, even the most laborious ministers will find; but at the same time they will have an inward consciousness, that they have exerted themselves sincerely for God, though not so earnestly as they might: and, in the hope that the Saviour, whose love they have proclaimed to others, will have mercy upon them, they cast themselves on him for the acceptance of their services, and expect, through him, the salvation of their souls. Moreover, if we have been diligent in the discharge of our high office, we shall have a good hope that we have been instrumental to the salvation of others, whom we shall have as our joy and crown of rejoicing in the last day. With these prospects before us, we shall labour patiently, waiting, like the

husbandman, for a distant harvest. Trials we shall have, of many kinds; and many, arising solely from our fidelity to God: but we shall bear up under them, going "through evil report and good report," till we have fought our fight, and finished our course: and then at last we shall be welcomed as faithful servants into the joyous presence of our Lord. Who would not wish for such happiness as this? Only then let our hearts experience what our lips have uttered, and that happiness is ours: only let our professions be verified, our promises fulfilled, and our prayers realized, and all will be well: God will see in us the heart which he approves, and will honour us with testimonies of his approbation to all eternity.

My second observation is, If there were in us such an heart, *what blessings would result to all around us!* The careless minister may spend many years in a populous parish, and yet never see one sinner converted from the error of his ways, or turned unto God in newness of life. But the faithful servant of Jehovah will have some fruit of his ministry. God will answer to him that prayer at the close of the ordination service, "Grant that Thy word, spoken by their mouths, may have such success, that it may never be spoken in vain!" God indeed does not make all equally useful; but he will leave none without witness, that the word which they preach is His Word, and that it is "the power of God unto the salvation of men." Behold, wherever such a minister is fixed, what a change takes place in reference to religion! The obstinately wicked, who either hear him with prejudice or turn their backs on his ministry, may possibly be only more hardened by the means he uses for their conversion; and circumstances may arise, where those who would once have plucked out their own eyes for him, may become for a while his enemies: but still there are many that will arise and call him blessed; many will acknowledge him as their spiritual father; many will bless God for him, and shew in their respective circles the happy

effects of his ministry. They will love his person; they will enjoy his preaching; they will tread in his steps; and they will shine as lights in a dark world. What, then, might not be hoped for, if all who have undertaken the sacred office of the ministry, fulfilled their engagements in the way we have before described? What if all *prayed* the prayers, instead of reading them; and laboured *out of the pulpit*, as well as in it; striving to bring all their people, "not only to the knowledge and love of Christ, but to such ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, as to leave no room among them, either for error in religion, or for viciousness of life?" If there were such exertions made in every parish, we should hear no more complaints about the increase of Dissenters. The people's prejudices in general are in favour of the Establishment: and the more any persons have considered the excellence of the Liturgy, the more are they attached to the Established Church. Some indeed would entertain prejudices against it, even if all the twelve Apostles were members of it, and ministered in it: but, in general, it is a want of zeal in its ministers, and not any want of purity in its institutions, that gives such an advantage to Dissenters. Let me not be misunderstood, as though by these observations I meant to suggest any thing disrespectful of the Dissenters; (for I honour all that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, of whatever church they be; and I wish them, from my heart, every blessing that their souls can desire:) but, whilst I see such abundant means of edification in the Church of England, I cannot but regret that any occasion should be given to men to seek for that in other places, which is so richly provided for them in their own church. Only let us be faithful to our engagements, and our churches will be crowded, our sacraments thronged, our hearers edified: good institutions will be set on foot; liberality will be exercised, the poor benefited, the ignorant enlightened, the distressed comforted; yea, and our "wilderness world will rejoice and blossom as the rose." O that we might see this happy day; which,

I would fondly hope, has begun to dawn! O that God would arise and "take to him his great power, and reign amongst us!" O that he might no longer have to express a wish, "that there *were* in us such an heart;" but rather have to rejoice over us as *possessed of* such an heart; and that he would magnify himself in us as instruments of good to a ruined world! The Apostle to the Hebrews represents all the saints of former ages as witnesses of the conduct of those who were then alive; and he urges it as an argument with them to exert themselves to the uttermost: "Having then," says he, "so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Thus let us consider the Reformers of our church as now looking down upon us, and filled with anxiety for the success of their labours: let us hear them saying, 'We did all that human foresight could do; we shewed to ministers what they ought to be; we bound them by the most solemn ties to walk in the steps of Christ and his Apostles: if any shall be lukewarm in their office, we shall have to appear in judgment against them, and shall be the means of aggravating their eternal condemnation.' Let us, I say, consider them as spectators of our conduct; and endeavour to emulate their pious examples. Let us consider, likewise, that the Liturgy itself will appear against us in judgment, if we labour not to the utmost of our power to fulfil the engagements which we have voluntarily entered into; yea, God himself will say to us, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant." May God enable us all to lay these things to heart; that, whether we have already contracted, or are intending at a future period to contract, this fearful responsibility, we may duly consider what account we shall have to give of it in the day of judgment!

## CXCV.

### THE DANGER OF PROSPERITY.

Deut. vi. 10—12. *It shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee goodly cities which thou buildedst not, and houses full of good things which thou filledst not, and wells digged which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive-trees which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.*

WE cannot but notice in this passage the confidence with which Moses assured the Israelites respecting their ultimate success in reference to their occupation of the land of Canaan. They had not yet passed over Jordan; yet does he speak to them as if they were in full possession of the land: so certain was it that God would fulfil to them all the promises which he had made unto their fathers. At the same time, we cannot but be struck with the intimation which is here given of man's proneness to ingratitude, and of the tendency of prosperity to deaden all the finer feelings of the soul. The caution which he gives them will lead me to set before you,

I. The natural ingratitude of man—

This will be found uniformly operating,

1. In relation to all his temporal concerns—

[We are struck with the peculiar goodness of God to Israel, in putting them into possession of so many blessings, for which they had never laboured. But, in truth, this was only an example of what he has done for man from the beginning of the world. Adam, when formed in Paradise, found every comfort prepared to his hand ——— And thus it is with every child that is born into the world. Every thing, according to his situation in life, is provided for his accommodation; and he has the full benefit of the labours of others, to which, of course, he has never contributed in the smallest particular. And through the whole of our lives we enjoy the same advantages; God having so ordained, that every man, in seeking his own welfare, shall contribute to the welfare of those around him. One man "builds houses;" another "fills them with good things;" another "digs wells;" another plants trees of different

descriptions; and all, in following their respective occupations, provide accommodations for others, which it would have been impossible for them ever to have enjoyed, but for this ordination of God, who has made private interest the means of advancing the public welfare. The only difference between the Israelites and us, in this respect, is, that what they gained by a bloody extermination of the inhabitants, we enjoy in a sweet and peaceful participation with the lawful owners.

Now, of course, it may well be expected that we should trace all these blessings to their proper source, and be filled with thankfulness to God, as the author and giver of them all. But the evil against which the Israelites were cautioned, is realized amongst us, to a great extent: we rest in the gift, and forget the Giver. In as far as we have any thing to do in providing these things for ourselves, we run into the very same error against which they were cautioned; ascribing the attainment of them to our own skill or prowess, instead of regarding them altogether as the gift of God[a]. In this we do not merely resemble the beasts, but actually degrade ourselves below them: for "the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; whilst we neither know, nor consider," nor regard, our adorable Benefactor[b].]

2. In relation even to the concerns of his soul—

[The deliverance of Israel from Egypt was typical of our deliverance from a far sorer bondage. But is it possible that we should ever be unmindful of that? Suppose it possible for man's ingratitude to extend to all that Israel experienced in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in Canaan; is it possible that his depravity should be so great as to render him forgetful of all the blessings of redemption? Can it be, that man should forget what his incarnate God has done for him, in relinquishing all the glory of heaven, and assuming our fallen nature, and bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, that he might deliver us from the bondage of corruption, and bring us to the everlasting possession of an heavenly inheritance? Yes: it is not only possible, but certain, that men are as unmindful of this as they are of their obligations for temporal blessings: yea, it is a fact, that many are far more thankful for their temporal mercies, than for this, which infinitely exceeds them all. And to what shall we compare their guilt in this respect? It has been seen that their ingratitude for temporal blessings reduces them below the beasts: and I am not sure that their ingratitude for spiritual benefits does not reduce them below the fallen angels themselves: for, whatever the guilt of those unhappy spirits may be, this we know at least,

[a] Deut. viii. 17, 18. [b] Isai. i. 2, 3. with Jer. ii. 32.

that they have never poured contempt on One who had assumed their nature, and borne their iniquities, to deliver them. This is a depravity peculiar to man: and this is a depravity that has pervaded every child of man. And to what an awful extent it has prevailed in all of us, let the conscience of every one amongst us bear witness. The character of us all is but too justly depicted in these words; "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, *neither were thankful*[c]."]

This increases, rather than diminishes, through the abundance of his mercies; as will be seen, whilst we point out,

II. The general effect of prosperity upon him—

The proper intent of God's mercies is, to fill us with humility and thankfulness before him: but, through the corruption of our nature, success,

1. Inflates those with pride whom it should humble—

[This was its sad effect on Israel: who, as the prophet complains, "sacrificed to their own net, and burned incense to their own drag[d]." And if we examine the general effect of prosperity amongst ourselves, we shall find, that success in business, and acquisition of honour, and elevation in society, are for the most part the fruitful parents of pride and arrogance and self-conceit. See how the purse-proud tradesman swells by reason of his wealth, as though he had been the author of his own success[e]; and how all his former servility is turned into a conceit of his own dignity, and a magisterial oppression of those below him[f]! ——— Yes, in truth, that saying is too often realized in every rank of the community, "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked[g]."

But can this ever be the effect of spiritual advancement? Of *real piety* it cannot: but of what *assumes the shape of* real piety, it may. Professors of religion, when they have acquired somewhat of a clearer knowledge of divine truth, aré very apt to be puffed up with it, and to "become, in their own conceit, wiser than their teachers." Hence it is, that so many set up for "teachers, whilst yet they understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm:" and many, because they have some

[c] Rom. i. 21. [d] Hab. i. 16.

[e] Compare Deut. viii. 17, 18. before cited, with 1 Tim. vi. 17.

[f] Perhaps there exists not on earth a stricter parallel between the Jews and us, than in the case of those who are elected Fellows in any of the Colleges of our Universities. Let the text be read in that view, and there will be found in it much profitable instruction to persons so circumstanced. [g] Deut. xxxii. 15, 18.

faint conception of what is spiritual, pour contempt on others as altogether carnal. To all such conceited professors I would say, "Be not high-minded, but fear:" "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."]

2. Lulls into security those whom it should quicken—

[The effect of affluence, especially of that which has been acquired by labour, is, to diminish the industry that has obtained it, and to reduce its possessor to the state of the rich fool in the Gospel: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat, drink, and be merry[h]." Indeed, ease is looked upon as the reward of industry; and the prospect of it is man's greatest incentive to diligence. But success, instead of weakening, should rather operate to augment our efforts for further success: not from a covetous desire of advancement, but from a desire to enlarge our means of doing good. Wealth, with all its attendant influence, should be regarded as a talent, not to be hidden in a napkin, but to be improved for God.

And what should be the effect of increased views of divine truth, and of augmented confidence in God? Should not these things quicken us, and every communication of grace to our souls, stimulate us to activity in the service of the Lord? I say, then, let none of you, because of your prosperity, be "settled on your lees;" but let every blessing, whether temporal or spiritual, be employed as a motive for exertion, and as a means of honouring your heavenly Benefactor.]

Let me now ADDRESS,

1. Those who have risen in the world—

[The example of David is that which you should follow. He, when assured by God that his kingdom should be established in his house to his latest posterity, "went in, and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto[i]?" Thus let your success operate on you. See the hand of God in it all; and acknowledge your own unworthiness; and adore that grace that has made you to differ from so many whose prospects were once equal to your own. And never forget, that prosperity is a snare which ruins thousands[k]; and that, if it makes your situation easier in this world, it obstructs your progress, even like clods of "clay upon your feet," to the world above[l].]

2. Those who, by reason of adverse circumstances, have been reduced—

[h] Luke xii. 16—21. [i] 2 Sam. vii. 18. [k] Prov. i. 22.
[l] Compare Hab. ii. 6. with Heb. xii. 1. and Matt. xix. 23, 24.

[How often has that which never could be effected by prosperity been produced by adversity. In prosperity, for the most part, we forget God; but "in the time of adversity we consider." "In their affliction," said God of his people of old, "they will seek me early:" "they will pour out a prayer, when my chastening is upon them." And have you found it thus with you? Then, however painful your afflictions may have been, they call rather for congratulation than condolence. The prosperity of the soul is that which alone is of any real value. Look to it then, that, in whatever ye decay, ye grow in grace: and know, that if only ye keep your eyes fixed, not on things visible and temporal, but on those which are invisible and eternal, "your light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory[m]."]

[m] 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18.

## CXCVI.

### A RIGHT IMPROVEMENT OF ELECTING LOVE.

Deut. vii. 6—10. *Thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people (for ye were the fewest of all people) but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the Lord thy God he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him, and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate him, to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face.*

THERE is in man a strange reluctance to contemplate the sovereignty of God: but, if duly improved, there is no subject more comforting to the soul, or more calculated to promote practical religion. It is this on which Moses insists, in order to deter the Israelites from connexions with the heathen, and to induce them to maintain inviolable the commandments of their God.

With similar views we would draw your attention to,

I. The privilege of God's people—

The Jews were "a special people unto the Lord their God"—

[They had been redeemed from a most oppressive bondage, instructed by the voice of revelation, supported by bread from heaven, brought into the nearest relation to the Deity, and honoured with access to him in ordinances of divine appointment. In these, and many other respects, they were distinguished above all other people upon earth[a].]

Such is also the privilege of all true believers—

[They have been rescued from the tyranny of sin and Satan[b], taught by the word and Spirit of God[c], furnished with daily supplies of grace[d], made sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty[e], and admitted into the most intimate communion with their God[f]. Nor were the Jews so much exalted above the heathen world, as true believers are above all others, even the professed followers of Christ[g].]

It will be no unprofitable subject of meditation, if we inquire into,

II. The source of that privilege—

The Jews owed all their blessings to the distinguishing grace of God—

[They were not chosen for their numbers, or for their goodness; for "they were the fewest" and most stiff-necked "of all people." God's love to them had its origin within his own bosom; "he loved them because he would love them:" and in due season he testified that love to them, because he had voluntarily engaged to do so.]

Nor can our blessings be traced to any other source—

[God, in choosing us to salvation, has not respect to any goodness in us, whether past, present, or future: not to *past;* for all of us, not excepting even the Apostles themselves, have been inconceivably vile[h]: not to *present;* for many of us, like Paul and the three thousand, were in the very midst of our sinful career, when God plucked us as brands from the burning[i]: not *future;* for we never should have had any thing

[a] Deut. iv. 7, 8. and xxxiii. 29. [b] 2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.
[c] John vi. 45. [d] John i. 16. [e] 2 Cor. vi. 18.
[f] 1 John i. 3. [g] Mark iii. 34, 35. Matt. xix. 28.
[h] Tit. iii. 3. Eph ii. 3. [i] Acts ii. 13. and ix. 1.

good in us, if it had not been given us of God[k]; and it is evident that the grace he has given us, can never be the ground and reason of his bestowing that grace upon us. He has "chosen us that we *might be* holy;" but not because we were so, or because he foresaw we should become so[l]. No reason can be assigned for his choosing us rather than others, except that assigned by our Lord himself, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight[m]." Nor has he kept us *on account of* our own stability (for we are all bent to backslide from him[n]), but on account of the covenant he has made with us in Christ[o], wherein he has engaged to preserve us unto his heavenly kingdom. In the whole of his conduct towards us he has acted according to "his eternal purpose and grace[p]."]

That we may not abuse so great a privilege, let us consider,

III. The improvement to be made of it—

We should attentively consider the character of God, who is,

1. Sovereign in the exercise of his mercy—

[His grace is his own, and he may dispose of it as he will[q]. If he had consigned us all over to perdition as he did the fallen angels, he had been just. We therefore can have no claim upon him for any share in his mercy. Whether he make us vessels of honour or of dishonour, we have no more ground of pride or murmuring, than the clay has, which is fashioned according to the potter's will[r]. Whether we will receive it or not, he is a Sovereign, that dispenses mercy according to his own will[s]; and, if there be any difference between one and another, that difference results, not from any power or goodness in us, but from God's free and sovereign grace[t].]

2. Faithful in the observance of his promises—

[They who have really an interest in the promises, are universally distinguished by this mark, "They love God, and keep his commandments." To these God will most assuredly approve himself "faithful." His "covenant" is ordered in all things, and he will inviolably "keep" it. What Joshua said to the whole Jewish nation, may be yet more extensively applied to all true believers, "No promise ever has failed them, or ever shall[u]."]

3. Terrible in the execution of his threatenings—

[k] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [l] Eph. i. 4. John xv. 16. [m] Matt. xi. 26.
[n] Hos. xi. 7. [o] Ps. lxxxix. 29—35.
[p] Rom. xi. 5. 2 Tim. i. 9. [q] Matt. xx. 15. [r] Rom. ix. 18—21.
[s] Eph. i. 11. [t] Rom. ix. 16, 18. [u] Josh. xxiii. 14.

[Those who do not love him, and keep his commandments, he considers as "hating him;" and he will surely "repay them to their face." Their proud rebellious conduct shall be recompensed on their own heads[x]. And, though now they seem as if they defied his majesty, they shall find to their cost that his patience has an end, and that, however merciful he is, he will by no means clear the guilty[y].]

Having fully considered this character of God, we should have a deep and an abiding persuasion of it wrought in our hearts.

We should KNOW it,

1. For the quickening of our diligence—

[Nothing will ever more strongly operate on our minds than the consideration of our obligations to God as the sovereign author of all our good desires, and the faithful preserver of them in our souls. This is the very improvement which Moses himself makes of the truths contained in the text[z]: and an inspired Apostle declares, that the dedication of ourselves to God is the very end, for which God himself has distinguished us by his sovereign grace[a]. Let us then be ever saying, "What shall I render unto the Lord?" and let us devote ourselves to him in body, soul, and spirit.]

2. For the quieting of our fears—

[The two principal sources of disquietude to the soul are, a sense of our unworthiness to receive God's mercies, and of our insufficiency to do his will. Now both of these are entirely removed by a view of God's character as exhibited in the text. As he is a sovereign, he may bestow his grace, as he often has done, on the most unworthy; he is most glorified by bestowing it on these very persons. And, as he is faithful, he may be safely trusted to accomplish his own promises, in his own time and way. Our weakness is no obstacle to him; it shall rather be an occasion of manifesting the perfection of his strength. Let us then commit ourselves into his hands; and every perfection he possesses shall be glorified in our salvation.]

[x] Deut. xxxii. 35. and xxix. 20. and Ezek. xxiv. 14.
[y] Exod. xxxiv. 7. [z] ver. 11. [a] 1 Pet. ii. 9.

## CXCVII.

### THE REASONS OF GOD'S DIVERSIFIED DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE.

Deut. viii. 2, 3. *And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness,*

*to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, (which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know,) that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.*

AMONGST the various things which distinguish man from the brute creation, is that faculty which he possesses of grasping within his mind things past and future; and of deriving both from the one and the other the most powerful incentives to action. The consideration of things future is that which operates most upon the bulk of mankind: but men of thoughtful and comprehensive minds derive the most important lessons of wisdom from reflecting on the past: and it is this retrospective view of things which distinguishes one man from another, almost as much as a prospective view of them does an adult person from a child. Hence Moses was peculiarly solicitous to draw the attention of the Israelites to all those wonderful events which had taken place, from the period when he was first commissioned to effect their deliverance from Egypt, to that hour when they were about to enter into the promised land: and truly there never was such an eventful period from the foundation of the world, nor one so replete with instruction as that.

Two things in particular we notice in the words before us;

I. The diversified dealings of God with his people—

In the dealings of God with the Jews we see a mixture of mercy and of judgment. His mercies to them were such as never were vouchsafed to any other people. His interpositions by ten successive plagues in order to effect their deliverance from Egypt, their passage through the sea, their preservation from "serpents and scorpions in that great and terrible wilderness[a];" their miraculous supplies of manna from the clouds, and of "water from the

[a] ver. 15.

rock of flint;" the preservation of "their garments and of their shoes[b] from waxing old during the space of forty years," and of "their feet also from swelling," notwithstanding the long journeys which at different times they were obliged to travel[c]; these, with innumerable other mercies not specified in the text, distinguished that people above every nation under heaven.

But at the same time God saw fit occasionally to let them feel the difficulties with which they were encompassed. He suffered them on some occasions to be tried both with hunger and thirst; and inflicted heavy chastisements upon them for their multiplied transgressions.

Now in this we have a glass wherein to see the dealings of God with his people in all ages:

1. His mercies to every one of us have been innumerable—

[At our very first formation in the womb, the power and goodness of God towards us were exercised in imparting to us all our faculties both of body and mind. We have been preserved by him from innumerable dangers, both seen and unseen. In our national, domestic, and individual capacity, we have been highly privileged — — — And though the interference of God on our behalf has not been so *visible* as that which was vouchsafed to the Jews, it has not been at all less *real*. Our supplies of food, of raiment, and of health, have been as much owing to the care of his providence, as if they had been given to us by miraculous interpositions.

The benefits of revelation too which we have enjoyed, have marked his special favour to our souls. In this respect we have been as much elevated above the heathen world as the Jews themselves were; or rather, still more elevated, in proportion to the clearer light which shines on us in the New Testament; which, in comparison of theirs, is as the meridian light to the early dawn — — —

But what shall we say of those who have tasted of redeeming love, and experienced the transforming efficacy of the Gospel of Christ? What tongue can declare the mercies vouchsafed to them? — — — Yet,]

2. We have also been partakers of his judgments—

[All of us have found this to be a chequered scene: some

[b] ver. 4. with Deut. xxix. 5. [c] Numb. ix. 21. with x. 33.

have been tried in one way, and others in another; some for a longer, and others for a shorter period; some in mind———— some in body———— some in estate———— Even those who have been most favoured in this respect, have found abundant reason to acknowledge, that "this is not our rest." To the young and inexperienced, the world appears a garden abounding with delights: but on a fuller acquaintance with it we find, that its roses have their thorns; and even its choicest delicacies often prove occasions of the sorest pain. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward."]

As, from our general notions of God's goodness, we might have expected that his dealings with his people would have been different from what we find them to be, let us inquire into,

II. His end and design in them—

The reasons here assigned for his dispensations towards the Jews, will afford us a clew for discovering his intentions towards ourselves. He diversifies his dispensations towards us,

1. To humble us—

[Were our mercies altogether unmixed, we should know nothing of the effect of judgments on the rebellious will of man: and if there were no intermission of adversity, we should be strangers to the effect of prosperity upon the carnal heart: but by the variety of states which we pass through, we are led to see the total depravity of our nature; since we can be in no state whatever, wherein the mind does not shew itself alienated from God, and averse to bear his yoke. We are apt to think that a change of circumstances would produce in us a change of conduct: but, as a person in a fever finds no posture easy, nor any food pleasant to his taste, so we, through the corruption of our hearts, find all situations alike unproductive of a permanent change in our dispositions towards God. "We are bent to backslide from him, even as a broken bow;" and every change of situation only serves to establish that melancholy truth, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." To convince us of this is the first work of God upon the soul[d], and the first object of all his dispensations."]

2. To prove us—

[It is easy to obey God at some times and in some respects, in comparison of what it is at other times and in other respects. God therefore puts us into a variety of situations, to try whether

[d] John xvi. 8.

we will make him the supreme object of our regard in all. At some times he gives health, and affluence, and honour, to see whether we will suffer these things to draw away our hearts from him, or whether we will improve them all for him. At other times he lays affliction upon our loins, to see whether we will retain our love to him, and bless him as well when he takes away as when he gives. At some times he permits us to be sorely tempted by Satan, and by the corrupt propensities of our own hearts, to prove whether we will prefer the maintenance of a good conscience to any of the gratifications of sense. At other times he permits persecution to rage against us, that it may appear whether we will sacrifice our interests, and life itself, for him. In fact, every change of circumstance is sent by him, precisely as the command respecting the sacrificing of Isaac was sent to Abraham: by that command "God tempted him;" and by every circumstance of life he tempts us, to "prove whether we will obey his commandments or no."]

3. To instruct us—

[We are apt to imagine that the happiness of man is greatly dependent upon earthly prosperity; and that the loss of temporal comforts is an irreparable evil. But God would teach us, that this is altogether a mistake. By loading us with all that this world can give, he shews us how insufficient earthly things are to make us happy: and, by reducing us to a state of want, or pain, or trouble of any kind, he leads us to himself, and then shews us how happy he can make us, though under circumstances the most painful to flesh and blood. This is a great and valuable lesson; most honourable to him, most beneficial to us: it elevates us completely above this lower world; and, in proportion as it is learned, enables us to live on God alone. When Satan tempted our Lord to distrust his heavenly Father's care, and to "command the stones to be made bread," our Lord reminded him of the lesson which was here recorded for the good of the Church; namely, that it was the blessing of God upon bread, and not the bread itself, that could do us good; and that that blessing would as easily produce the effect without means as with them. Thus he teaches us that, in having God, we have ALL; and that, without him, we have *nothing*.]

4. To do us good at our latter end[e]—

[If our state were never diversified, we should have but one set of graces called forth into action: but, by experiencing alterations and reverses, we are led to exercise every kind of grace: and by this means we grow in every part, just as the members of the body grow, when all are duly exercised[f].

[e] ver. 16. [f] Col. ii. 19. 1 Pet. ii. 2.

Moreover, according to the measure which we attain of the stature of Christ, will be the recompence of our reward: every grace we exercise, whether active or passive, will be noted in the book of God's remembrance, and "be found to our praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ[g]:" the one as well as the other, though but weak and defective in itself, is "working out for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory."]

APPLICATION—

1. Let us trace, every one of us, the dealings of God with us—

[A more instructive history we could not read, than that of the Lord's dealings with us from our earliest infancy to the present moment. If it were recorded with the minuteness and fidelity that the history of the Jews has been, we should see, that as face answers to face in a glass, so does our experience to theirs. We are apt to wonder at their wickedness; but we should cease to wonder at them, if we were thoroughly acquainted with ourselves. Our wonder would rather be at the patience and forbearance, the mercy and the kindness, of our God. Earnestly then would we recommend to every one to apply to himself the injunction in our text, "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness:" and we may rest assured that such habits of reflection will bring their own reward along with them[h].]

2. Let our experience of his past kindness lead us to confide in him in future—

[The way in which the Israelites were led was circuitous and dreary: yet we are told that God "led them by the *right* way." It may be that our way also has been such as has excited many murmurs, and great discouragement: but, if we have considered it to any good purpose, we shall acknowledge it to have been on the whole more profitable for us, than any that we should have chosen for ourselves. Perhaps we shall see cause to bless our God for some of our heaviest trials, more than for any of those things which administered to our pleasure. Convinced then by our past experience, we should be willing to leave matters to the disposal of our God; and to submit to any trials, which he sends for the promotion of our eternal welfare. Our only solicitude should be to make a due improvement of his dispensations: and if only we may be humbled, instructed, sanctified, and exalted by them, we should cordially and continually say, "Let him do what seemeth him good."]

[g] 1 Pet. i. 7. [h] Ps. cvii. 43.

## CXCVIII.

### AGAINST SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SELF-CONCEIT.

Deut. ix. 4—6. *Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand, therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people.*

MAN is a dependent creature: he has nothing of his own: he can do nothing: he can control no event whatever; he is altogether in the hands of God, who supports him in life, and accomplishes both in him and by him his own sovereign will and pleasure. Yet he affects wisdom, though "he is born like a wild ass's colt;" and strength, though he is "crushed before the moth:" nay, so extraordinary is his blindness, that he arrogates righteousness to himself, though he is so corrupt, that he has "not so much as one imagination of the thoughts of his heart which is not evil continually." If there ever were a people that might be expected to be free from self-complacent thoughts, it must be the Israelites who were brought out of Egypt; for no people ever had such opportunities of discovering the evil of their hearts as they had. No persons ever received such signal mercies, as they; nor ever betrayed such perverseness of mind, as they. Yet did Moses judge it necessary to caution even them, not to ascribe to any merits of their own the interpositions of God in their behalf, but to trace them to their proper source—the determination of God to display in and by them his own glorious perfections.

The words which I have read to you, will furnish me with a fit occasion to shew,

I. How prone we are to self-complacent thoughts—

There are many things which men would not utter with their lips, which yet they will "speak in their hearts." "The fool hath said *in his heart*, There is no God." But no rational man would be such a fool as to say it with his lips. So, one can scarcely conceive any man absurd enough to impute in express terms to himself, his successes, either in temporal or spiritual matters: yet, "in the spirit of our minds," we are prone to do it in reference to both.

1. In reference to temporal matters—

[In the event of our succeeding in trade, in husbandry, in war, how apt are we to ascribe to ourselves what really has proceeded from God alone. We may have shewn wisdom in our use of means: but who has rendered those means effectual? Can the merchant command the seas, or the husbandman the clouds, or the warrior the events of war? Yet we take the glory to ourselves, as if we had reaped nothing but the fruits, the necessary fruits, of our own superior skill. Now what should we have thought of the disciples, if, when they had "toiled all the night in fishing, and had taken nothing," and afterwards, in obedience to their Lord's directions, had "launched out into the deep again, and taken at one draught so many fishes that both their ships began to sink"—what, I say, should we have thought of them, if they had ascribed this success to their own wisdom and skill[a]? Yet *this* is the very thing which we do, in reference to our successes in any matter; "we sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense unto our own drag[b]."]

2. In reference to spiritual matters—

[In relation to things of a spiritual nature, we should suppose that no man would think of indulging this propensity; because in the natural man there is not so much as one good desire. But, strange as it may seem, we are more tenacious of our supposed self-sufficiency in reference to these things than to any others. There is not any one who does not hope to conciliate the divine favour by something that he shall do; and that does not imagine himself capable of doing it by his own inherent strength, whensoever he shall be pleased to undertake the work. To self-righteousness, in particular, men cleave with an obstinacy that nothing but Omnipotence can overcome. This was the real cause of the rejection of the Jews, that they would persist in labouring to establish a righteousness of their own by the works of the Law, when they should have embraced

[a] Luke v. 4—7. and again John xxi. 3—6. [b] Hab. i. 16.

the righteousness which is of God by faith[c]. And this is the principle which we have to combat in all our ministrations, and which is the very last that yields to the Gospel of Christ. Men think to get to heaven by their own righteousness; and hope, like the Israelites in Canaan, to make the very mercy of God himself a pedestal for their own fame. "Stiff-necked" as Israel were, they would arrogate to themselves this glory: and vile as we are, we fondly cherish this vain conceit. To renounce wholly our own righteousness, and to submit cordially to the righteousness of Christ, is the last sacrifice we can be brought to make, and the crown and glory of converting grace.]

That I may, as God shall enable me, beat down all self-complacent conceits, I will proceed to shew,

II. How erroneous they are—

To the self-righteous Israelites, Moses said, "Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Now here Moses has informed us what it is that God consults in all his dispensations, even the glory of his own perfections:

1. Of his justice and holiness—

[God determined to shew his indignation against sin: and therefore, when the iniquity of the Canaanites was full, and they were ripe for vengeance, he drove them forth from their land, and utterly destroyed them. The Israelites he used merely as his instruments, whom he had raised up to fulfil his will: and in them he made known his power to execute what his justice had decreed.

Look now at the redemption which he has vouchsafed to us, and you shall find it altogether ordained to display the very same perfections of the Deity. Look at the atonement made for sin: go to Calvary, and behold the Lamb of God expiating, by his own blood, the guilt of a ruined world! There read the holiness of God, in his hatred of sin, and his justice in punishing it. Or go to the Gospel, which proclaims this deliverance; and declares, that none shall ever be saved who do not plead this atonement as their only hope; and none shall ever perish who truly and unfeignedly rely upon it. Go, follow the self-

[c] Rom. ix. 31, 32.

complacent Pharisee to the regions of misery, or the believing penitent to the realms of bliss, and you shall see in both an equal display of these very perfections: in the one, the punishment of sin in his own person; in the other, the reward of righteousness, wrought out for him by our Lord Jesus Christ.]

2. Of his faithfulness and truth—

[To Abraham, God had promised the possession of the land of Canaan; yet not to Abraham personally, but in his descendants. The fulfilment of this promise was delayed four hundred and thirty years: but it was not forgotten. When the time for its accomplishment was fully come, it was fulfilled; and in fulfilling it, God shewed himself faithful to his promises. And if any one of us should ever arrive at the heavenly Canaan, it will be in consequence of the covenant made with Christ; wherein the Father stipulated, that "if his Son would make his soul an offering for sin, he should see a seed who should prolong their days, and the pleasure of the Lord should prosper in his hands[d]." Whence is it that any one of us is led to Christ? Whence is it that we are carried in safety through this dreary wilderness, and brought at last to the possession of the heavenly land? Was it for our righteousness that we were chosen? No: "God loved us simply because he would love us[e]." Was it for our righteousness that we were preserved? No: we were "a stiff-necked people" from first to last. Was it for our righteousness that we were crowned with ultimate success? No: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he will have saved us[f]," "according to the good pleasure of his own will, to the praise of the glory of his own grace[g]."

It is worthy of observation, that *no less than three times* in the short space of our text does God declare that his people were not thus favoured on account of their own righteousness: and amongst all the hosts of heaven there will not be found so much as one, who does not ascribe his salvation altogether to God and to the Lamb; that is, to the electing love of the Father, and to the redeeming love of Christ.]

In order still more forcibly to counteract self-righteous thoughts, I proceed yet further to shew,

III. The importance of utterly discarding them from our own minds—

Observe the energy with which this hateful propensity is assailed: "Understand, therefore," says Moses, "that the Lord giveth thee not this good

[d] Isai. liii. 10. [e] Deut. vii. 7, 8. [f] Tit. iii. 4. [g] Eph. i. 4—6.

land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people." How much more, then, may I say this to you, in reference to the heavenly land! "Understand it," then, and consider it well: for to dream of any righteousness of your own, is to be guilty,

1. Of the grossest injustice—

[Did the self-applauding Israelites rob God of his glory? How much more do ye! What becomes of all his stupendous love, in giving his only Son to die for you? What becomes of his sovereign grace, in choosing you at first, and in giving you to his Son? What becomes of all his mercy in pardoning, his power in sanctifying, his faithfulness in keeping you to the end? By this one act of self-righteousness you rob God of it all; and take the crown from the Saviour's head, to put it on your own. What construction would you put on similar conduct shewn towards yourselves? If you had taken the most helpless and worthless of the human race from a dunghill, and had with vast cost and trouble educated him for your heir, and had actually made over to him all that you possess; would you think he offered you no indignity, if he denied his obligations to your unmerited love, and ascribed all the glory of his exaltation to his own superior merit, which left you no option, but claimed it all at your hands? How base, then, must ye be, if ye so requite the love of Almighty God! Know, that "His is the kingdom," to which you have been called: and "His is the power," by which you have been kept: and "His must be the glory" for ever and ever.]

2. Of the extremest folly—

[What can provoke God, if this does not? Or, what can ye expect, but that, as the recompence of your conceit and arrogance, he should say to you, 'Go on without my help. You have done thus much for yourselves: carry on now the good work within you. You have overcome Satan: overcome him still. You have merited my favour: continue still to merit it. You have paid a price for heaven: complete your purchase. Bring with you your works to my judgment-seat; and I will deal with you according to them.' Ah, Beloved! what would become of us, if God were thus to give us up to our proud delusions, and our vain conceits? It would soon appear what we are, and what measure of sufficiency we possess for any thing that is good. If, then, you would not provoke God to give you up altogether to yourselves, discard from your minds these "lofty imaginations, and let every thought of your hearts be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."]

Having thus directed my attention, throughout the whole subject, to the self-sufficient, I will conclude with an ADDRESS to,

1. The desponding sinner—

[You are ready to say, God will not have mercy upon me, because I have no righteousness whereby to recommend myself to him. But you need none for this end. It was not the righteous, but sinners, whom he came to save. You are to go to Christ guilty, that you may be forgiven; vile, that you may be made holy; and weak, that his strength may be perfected in your weakness. "*Understand*" this; and your conscious unworthiness, so far from appearing any longer a bar to your acceptance with him, will be a motive for coming to him, and an encouragement to trust in him: for "where sin has abounded, there, you have reason to hope, shall his grace much more abound."]

2. The joyful saint—

[Let not the freedom of God's grace ever prove a snare to you. Though God will never save you *for* your righteousness, he will never save you in an unrighteous state. Though he requires no righteousness of yours as the ground of your acceptance with him, he requires the utmost attainments in righteousness as your meetness for heaven; yes, and as the means whereby he may be glorified. Take heed, therefore, that you "*understand*" this: for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." At the same time, you must cultivate a spirit directly opposite to that of the self-applauding Pharisee—a spirit of humiliation and self-abasement before God. *This was the state of mind which he required of those whom he conducted into Canaan;* and this is the spirit which he expects to find in us. Hear his own words to them, and to us in them: "Ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country for the which I lifted up mine hand to give it to your fathers. And there shall ye remember your ways, and all your doings wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all the evils that ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt dealings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord God[h]." Here, I say, you see the spirit that becomes you. To your latest hour, and in your highest attainments, be ye abased, and let God be glorified as "all in all!"]

[h] Ezek. xx. 42—44. and xxxvi. 22, 32.

## CXCIX.

### A PENITENTIAL RETROSPECT ENJOINED.

Deut. ix. 7. *Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness.*

THERE is no sin more deeply rooted in the heart of man than pride: nor is there any thing which will not serve as a foundation for it to prefer its claims. Even an excess of impiety will afford to some an occasion of glorying; and a precedence in rebellion against God, give them a title to praise amongst those whom they have out-stripped in the career of wickedness. It may well be expected, then, that success in any lawful enterprise should very generally be thought to give a man a legitimate ground for self-applause. Yet, doubtless, if ever there were a people less entitled to self-admiration than others, it was the people of Israel, who were a stiff-necked people from the very first moment that God took them under his peculiar care. And, if ever there were a matter that entirely precluded all ground of glorying, surely it was the establishing of that people in the land of Canaan. Their fathers had all provoked God to destroy them in the wilderness: and they themselves were also a rebellious generation: so that they at least might be expected to acknowledge themselves indebted to the sovereign grace of God for all the blessings of the promised land. But behold, God, who knew what was in man, was constrained to caution them against the enormous evil of ascribing to their own superior goodness all the interpositions of God in their behalf: "Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations, the Lord doth drive them out from before thee. Understand, therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people. Remember, and forget not how thou

provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness." This was the state of mind which became them; and this is the habit that becomes us also.

To fix this admonition the more deeply on your minds, I will endeavour to shew,

I. What impression sin makes upon the mind of God—

It is not so light an evil as we are ready to imagine. It is most offensive to God: it is "that abominable thing which his soul hateth[a]." In what abhorrence he holds it, we may see,

1. By his own positive declarations—

["In the day that thou eatest of the forbidden tree, thou shalt die[b]," was the declaration of God in Paradise: and "The soul that sinneth, it shall die[c]," has been his solemn warning to all mankind, even to the present hour. Yes; "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men[d]." "The wicked," saith David, "shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God[e]." And again: "Upon the ungodly shall God rain snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest: this shall be their portion to drink[f]:" "they shall go into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels[g]:" "they shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and the smoke of their torment shall ascend up for ever and ever: and they shall have no rest, day nor night[h]:" they shall be "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched[i];" and shall spend eternity itself in "weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth[k]."

Now I would ask, What can such declarations mean? or rather, What can *they* mean who set them all at nought, and say, "I shall have peace, though I walk after the imaginations of my own evil heart[l]?"]

2. By the actual exhibitions of his wrath—

[It is easy to say, "The Lord doth not see, neither will the Almighty regard it." But how do his dispensations accord with these conceits? Was the sin of Adam visited with no expression of his wrath? Was there no manifestation of his anger at the deluge? None on the cities of the plain, the punishment of which was a figure of hell itself? Look at his

[a] Jer. xliv. 4. [b] Gen. ii. 17. [c] Ezek. xviii. 4.
[d] Rom. i. 18. [e] Ps. ix. 17. [f] Ps. xi. 6.
[g] Matt. xxv. 41. [h] Rev. xiv. 10, 11. [i] Mark ix. 44, 46, 48.
[k] Matt. xxv. 30. [l] Deut. xxix. 19.

dealings with Israel in the wilderness: Was sin unpunished there? Do we see there no marks of his displeasure, no proofs of the connexion which he has established between sin and misery? Does the destruction of that whole people in the wilderness give us no insight into this matter? When we see what was inflicted on a man for gathering sticks upon the Sabbath[m], on Uzzah for a mistake[n], on the men of Bethshemesh for unhallowed curiosity[o], on Herod for pride[p], on Ananias for a lie[q], shall we listen to the voice that tells us, that "the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil[r]?" Know ye of a truth, beloved Brethren, that "God is angry with the wicked every day[s];" and that "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not go unpunished[t]."]

From hence, then, we may see,

II. The impression which it should make on our minds—

Verily, as it makes a deep impression upon God's mind, so should it also upon ours. We should remember it; and never forget so much as one sin, if it were possible; but should have the iniquity of our whole lives ever treasured up in our minds, and standing in one accumulated mass before our eyes.

This is necessary for the unpardoned sinner—

[We are not to imagine, that it is sufficient for us to acknowledge in a general way that we are sinners, or to have our minds fixed on one or two enormous transgressions, and to confess them to God. We ought to trace sin to the fountain-head, and see how totally we are by nature alienated from God, and "enemies to him in our minds by wicked works:" and at the same time we should have such views of particular transgressions, as to be constrained to come to God, saying, "Thus and thus have I done:" and without such a view of our sins we can have no *repentance*, no *forgiveness*, nor even so much as any *preparation of heart for the Gospel* of Christ.

Without calling our ways to remembrance, we can have no *repentance*. For, what is repentance, but a confession of our sins, and mourning over them before God? ——— We can have no *forgiveness;* for "he that covereth his sins shall not prosper: it is he only who confesseth and forsaketh them that shall find mercy[u]" ——— Nor can a person be *prepared to receive the Gospel:* for the Gospel is a remedy; for which they

[m] Numb. xv. 33—35. [n] 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7. [o] 1 Sam. vi. 19.
[p] Acts xii. 23. [q] Acts v. 3—10. [r] Zeph. i. 12.
[s] Ps. vii. 11. [t] Prov. xi. 21. [u] Prov. xxviii. 13.

who are unconscious of any malady can have no desire; as our Lord has said, "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance[x]." What then shall an unpardoned sinner do? If he look not back on his transgressions, to mourn over them before God, he rivets them all upon his own soul, and ensures to himself the judgments of an offended God[y].]

Nor is it a whit less necessary for a pardoned saint—

[In a great variety of views it is desirable for him: first, *for the deepening of his humility*. Superficial views of sin, though they may suffice to bring us to the Saviour, will never produce that self-lothing and self-abhorrence which are the foundation of all that is good and great in the Christian character[z]——— Next, *for the inflaming of his gratitude*. Our gratitude will always bear proportion to our sense of sin. "The man that has been forgiven little, will love little[a]:" but the man who is sensible, fully sensible, what his deserts have been, will be filled with such wonder and admiration at the goodness of God towards him, as no words can adequately express[b]——— Further, these views of sin are desirable *for the confirming of his principles*. Let him feel the extent of his guilt, and he will not need to be told that salvation must be altogether of grace, or through faith in Christ. He will see that a soul taken out of hell itself would not be a greater monument of grace than he: he knows himself to be "a brand plucked out of the burning[c];" and that if there were not an atonement provided for him, and a free salvation offered to him, Satan himself would have as good a hope of mercy as he——— These views are yet further desirable *for the augmenting of his care and watchfulness*. Let a man see how he has fallen, and how, even though he may not actually have fallen, he has been tempted by sinful inclinations: he will then see what must have been his state to all eternity, if God had left him to himself; and what must yet be his state, if God should not continually uphold him——— Lastly, they are necessary *for the meetening of his soul for glory*. Go up to heaven, and see the state of the saints there: see how they fall on their faces before the throne: hear with what incessant praises they ascribe salvation to God and to the Lamb[d]. If you were to go from one end of heaven to the other, you would not hear one self-applauding word, or witness one self-admiring thought. There is but one song throughout all the realms of bliss: and the deeper our

[x] Matt. ix. 12, 13. [y] Luke xiii. 3.
[z] Ezek. xvi. 63. and xxxvi. 31. [a] Luke vii. 47.
[b] 1 Tim. i. 13—15. "Grace exceeding abundant."
[c] Zech. iii. 2. [d] Rev. v. 14.

sense of obligation to God is for the wonders of redeeming love, the better we shall be prepared to make it the one subject of our thanksgivings to all eternity.]

Before I conclude, let me ADD a few words to those who are either looking to God for acceptance through their own righteousness, or imagining that they have already found mercy on such ground as that—

[Take a retrospect of your past lives, and call to remembrance the whole of your conduct in this wilderness world. Compare your lives with the requirements of God's law; and see whether even so much as a day or an hour has ever passed, that has not given you ground for the deepest humiliation. But if you will not remember your sins, know assuredly, that God will. He says, by the Prophet Amos; "The Lord hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works[e]." In the day of judgment, too, will he remember them; yes, and bring them to your remembrance also: for they are all recorded in his book; and when set before you with all their aggravations, they will then appear to you, not light and venial, as they now do, but worthy of the deepest and heaviest condemnation. Stay not, then, till that day, but call them to remembrance now, and beg of God to set them all in order before your eyes. As for the pain which a sight of them will occasion, would you not wish to be pained with that which has so grieved your God? And is it not better to feel a penitential sorrow now, than to die in impenitence, and lie down under the wrath of God for ever? In recommending penitence, I am your best friend; and those who would encourage you to forget your sins are, in truth, your greatest enemies. Begin, then, to "sorrow after a godly sort[f]," and go to the Lord with all your sins upon you: so shall you have them all "blotted out as a morning cloud," and "cast by God himself into the depths of the sea." Here is a great mystery: if you forget your sins, God will remember them: but if you remember them, God will forget them utterly, and "remember them against you no more for ever[g]."]

[e] Amos viii. 7. [f] 2 Cor. vii. 11. [g] Heb. viii. 12.

---

## CC.

### THE REPLACING OF THE TWO TABLES OF THE COVENANT.

Deut. x. 1, 2. *At that time the Lord said unto me, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto me into the mount, and make thee an ark of wood: and I will*

*write on the tables the words that were in the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark.*

THOSE to whom the modes of communication which are common in eastern countries are but little known, feel a jealousy respecting every thing that is figurative and emblematical. But even in the New Testament there is much that is hidden under figures. The whole life of our blessed Saviour is justly considered as *an example:* but it is rarely considered that in all its principal events it was also *emblematical* of what is spiritually experienced in the heart of the believer: the circumcision of Christ representing the circumcision of our hearts; the baptism, also, and the crucifixion, and the resurrection of Christ, marking our death unto sin, and our new birth unto righteousness. If then in the New Testament, where truth is exhibited so plainly, there are many things revealed in shadows, we may well expect to find much that is figurative in the Old Testament, where the whole system of religion was veiled under types and figures. The circumstances before us, we do not hesitate to say, have a hidden meaning, which, when brought forth, will be highly instructive. But in exploring the mysteries that are hid under these shadows, there is need of the utmost sobriety, that we impose not on Scripture any other sense than that which God himself designed it to convey. However some may gratify themselves with exercising their ingenuity on the sacred writings, and please themselves with their own fanciful interpretations of God's blessed word, I dare not proceed in that unhallowed course: I would "put off my shoes, when I come upon this holy ground;" and be content to leave untouched what I do not understand, and what God has not enabled me to explain, with a good hope at least that I express only "the mind of his Spirit." With this reverential awe upon my mind, I will endeavour, as God shall help me, to set before you what I conceive to be contained in the passage which we have just read. In it we notice,

I. The breaking of the two tables of the law—

God, after he had published by an audible voice the law of the Ten Commandments, wrote them upon two tables of stone, and gave them to Moses upon Mount Horeb, that they might serve as a memorial of what all who entered into covenant with him were bound to perform. But when Moses, on descending from the mount, found that the whole people of Israel were worshipping the golden calf, he was filled with righteous indignation, and "brake the two tables in pieces before their eyes[a]." Now this action of his imported,

1. That the covenant which God had made with them was utterly dissolved—

[Repeatedly are the two tables called "the tables of the covenant[b];" because they contained the terms on which the Israelites were ultimately to find acceptance before God. But their idolatry was a direct violation of the very first precept of the decalogue, or rather an utter subversion of the whole: and as they had thus broken the covenant on their part, Moses by breaking the two tables declared it to be annulled on God's part. God now disclaimed all connexion with them; and by calling them "*thy* people," that is, Moses' people, he disowned them for *his;* and threatened to "blot out their name from under heaven." All this was intimated, I say, by Moses, in this significant action. A similar mode of expressing the same idea was adopted by Jehovah in the days of the Prophet Zechariah. He took two staves, one to represent the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; and the other, the ten tribes. These he brake, the one after the other, in order to shew that as they were disjoined from each other, so they should henceforth be separated from him also, and that "his covenant with them" both was dissolved[c]. Thus far then, we apprehend, the import of this expressive action is clear.

The further light which I shall endeavour to throw upon it, though not so clear to a superficial observer, will to a well-instructed mind approve itself to be both just and important.]

It further imports then,

2. That that mode of covenanting with God was from that time for ever closed—

[This, I grant, does not at first sight appear; though it may be inferred from the very circumstance of *the same law* being

[a] Deut. ix. 10, 15, 16, 17. [b] Deut. ix. 9, 11, 15.
[c] Zech. xi. 7, 10, 14.

afterwards given *in a different way*. This mode of conveying *such* instruction repeatedly occurs in the Holy Scriptures. The Prophet Jeremiah tells the Jews that God would "make a *new* covenant with them;" from whence St. Paul infers that the covenant under which they lived, was old, and "*ready to vanish away*[d]." The Prophet Haggai speaks of God "shaking once more the heavens and the earth:" and this St. Paul interprets as an utter removal of the Jewish dispensation, that "the things which could not be shaken," the Christian dispensation, "might remain[e]." Now if these apparently incidental *words* conveyed so much, what must have been intended by that *action*, an action which, in point of singularity, yields not to any within the whole compass of the sacred records?

But is this view of the subject confirmed by any further evidence? I answer, Yes; it is agreeable to the whole scope of the inspired volume. Throughout the New Testament we have this truth continually and most forcibly inculcated, that the law, having been once broken, can never justify: that, whilst under *it*, we are, and ever must be, under a curse: and therefore we must be dead to it, and renounce all hope of acceptance by it. And the breaking of the tables before their eyes was in effect like the driving of our first parents out of Paradise, and the preventing of their return to it by the menaces of a flaming sword. The tree of life which was to them in their state of innocence a pledge of eternal life, was no longer such when they had fallen: and therefore God in mercy prohibited their access to it, in order that they might be shut up to that way of reconciliation which God had provided for them in the promised seed. And thus did Moses by this significant action cut off from the Jews all hope of return to God by that covenant which they had broken, and shut them up to that other, and better, covenant, which God was about to shadow forth to them.]

But the chief mystery lies in,

II. The manner in which they were replaced—

Moses, having by his intercession obtained forgiveness for the people, was ordered to prepare tables of stone similar to those which he had broken, and to carry them up to the mount, that God might write upon them with his own finger a fresh copy of the law. He was ordered also to make an ark, in which to deposit the tables when so inscribed. Now what was the scope and intent of these directions? Truly

[d] Jer. xxxi. 31. with Heb. viii. 13.
[e] Hagg. ii. 6. with Heb. xii. 26, 27.

they were of pre-eminent importance, and were intended to convey the most valuable instruction. Mark,

1. The renewing of the tables which had been broken—

[This intimated that God was reconciled towards them, and was still willing to take them as his people, and to give himself to them as their God. The very first words of the Law thus given said to them, "I am the Lord thy God." So that on this part of the subject it is unnecessary to dwell.]

2. The putting of them, when so renewed, into an ark—

[Christ is that ark into which the law was put. To him it was committed, in order that he might fulfil it for us. He was made under the law for this express end[f]: and he has fulfilled it in all its parts; enduring all its penalties, and obeying all its precepts[g]. This he was appointed of God to do: the law was put into his heart on purpose that he might do it[h]: and having done it, he is "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth[i]." Hence we are enabled to view the law without fear, and to hear it without trembling. Now we can contemplate its utmost requirements, and see that it has been satisfied in its highest demands. We can now even found our hopes upon it; not as obeyed by us; but as obeyed by our surety and substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ; by whose obedience it has been more magnified than it has ever been dishonoured by our disobedience. It is no longer now a "ministration of death and condemnation[k]," but a source of life to those who plead the sacrifice and obedience of Jesus Christ. In this view the law itself, no less than the prophets, bears testimony to Christ[l], and declares that, through his righteousness, God can be "a just God, and yet a Saviour[m]," "just, and yet the justifier of all them that believe[n]." This is the great mystery which the angels so much admire, and which they are ever endeavouring to look into[o].

If it appear strange that so much should be intimated in so small a matter, let us only consider what we know assuredly to have been intimated in an occurrence equally insignificant, which took place *at the very same time*. When Moses came down with *these* tables in his hand, his face shined so bright that the people were unable to approach him; and he was constrained to put a vail upon his face in order that they might

[f] Gal. iv. 4, 5. [g] Gal. iii. 13, 14. Phil. ii. 8.
[h] Ps. xl. 8. [i] Rom. x. 4. [k] 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9.
[l] Rom. iii. 21, 22. [m] Isai. xlv. 21. [n] Rom. iii. 26.
[o] Carefully compare Exod. xxv. 17—20. with 1 Pet. i. 12.

have access to him to hear his instructions[p]. This denoted *their incapacity to comprehend the law, till Christ should come to remove the veil from their hearts*[q]. And precisely in the same manner the putting of the law into the ark denoted *the incapacity of man to receive it as it is in itself, and the necessity of viewing it only as fulfilled in Christ.* "Through the law" itself which denounces such curses[r], and "through the body of Christ" which sustained those curses[s], we must be "dead to the law," and have no hope whatever towards God but in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ[t], who, in consequence of obeying its precepts and enduring its penalties, is to be called by every child of man, "The Lord our Righteousness."]

3. The preparing the tables on which the law was written—

[The first tables were prepared by God himself: but, when they were broken, and to be renewed, Moses was ordered to prepare the tables, and carry them up to the mount, that they might there have the law inscribed upon them by God himself. Commentators have suggested that this was intended to intimate, that though God alone could write the law on the heart, means were to be used for that end by people for themselves, and by ministers in their behalf. But I rather gather from it a deeper and more important lesson, namely, that notwithstanding the law was fulfilled for us by Christ, we must seek to have it inscribed on our stony hearts; and that, if we go up with them to the mount of God from time to time for that end, God will write his law there. I the rather believe this to be the true meaning, because our *deadness to* the law *as a covenant of works* is continually associated with *a delight in it as a rule of life*[u]; and because the writing of the law upon our hearts is the great distinguishing promise of the New Covenant[x]. In this view the direction respecting the tables is very instructive, seeing that it unites what can never be separated, a "hope in Christ" as the only Saviour of the world, and a "purifying of the heart as he is pure[y]."]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us be thankful that the law is given to us in this mitigated form—

[The law is the same as ever: not a jot or tittle of it was altered, or ever can be: it is as immutable as God himself[z].

[p] Exod. xxxiv. 29—35. [q] 2 Cor. iii. 13—16. [r] Gal. ii. 19.
[s] Rom. vii. 4. [t] Gal. ii. 15, 16. Phil. iii. 9.
[u] See Gal. ii. 19. and Rom. vii. 4. before cited.
[x] Jer. xxxi. 31—33. with Heb. viii. 8—10.
[y] 1 John iii. 3. [z] Matt. v. 17, 18.

But as given on Mount Sinai, it was "a fiery law;" and so terrible, that the people could not endure it; and "even Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake[a]." But in the ark, Christ Jesus, its terrors are abated: yea, to those who believe in him, it has no terror at all: its demands are satisfied in their behalf, and its penalties sustained: and, *on it, as fulfilled in him*, they found their claims of everlasting life[b]. It must never be forgotten, that *the mercy-seat was of the same dimensions with the ark;* and *to all who are in Christ Jesus does the mercy of God extend*[c]. If we look to the law as fulfilled in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, we have nothing to fear: "we are no longer under the law, but under grace[d]:" and "there is no condemnation to us[e]." "Only let us rely on him as having effected every thing for us[f], and all that he possesses shall be ours[g]."]

2. Let us seek to have it visibly written upon our hearts—

[None but God can write it there: our stony hearts are harder than adamant. Nevertheless, if we go up to God in the holy mount, "he will take away from us the heart of stone, and give us a heart of flesh[h]:" and then "on the fleshly tables of our heart" will he write his perfect law[i]. O blessed privilege! Beloved Brethren, let us covet it, and seek it night and day. Only think, what a change will take place in you when this is wrought! What a lustre will be diffused over your very countenance[k]! Yes verily, all who then behold you shall "take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus," and "confess, that God is with you of a truth." Despair not, any of you: though ye have turned from God to the basest idolatry, yet has your great Advocate and Intercessor prevailed for you to remove the curses of the broken law, and to restore you to the favour of your offended God. Bring me up, says God, your hearts of stone, and I will so inscribe my law upon them, that "ye shall never more depart from me, nor will I ever more depart from you[l]." Brethren, obey the call without delay: lose not a single hour. Hasten into the presence of your God; and there abide with him, till he has granted your request. So shall "ye be God's people, and he shall be your God, for ever and ever[m]."]

[a] Heb. xii. 19—21. [b] Isai. xlv. 24.
[c] Exod. xxv. 10, 21, 22. Mark the promise in ver. 22.
[d] Rom. vi. 14. [e] Rom. viii. 1. [f] Rom. viii. 34.
[g] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. [h] Ezek. xxxvi. 26. [i] 2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.
[k] Exod. xxxiv. 29, 30. [l] Jer. xxxii. 38—41.
[m] Jer. xxxii. 38—41.

## CCI.

REASONABLENESS AND EXCELLENCY OF GOD'S COMMANDS.

Deut. x. 12, 13. *And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?*

PECULIAR seasons call for the exercise of peculiar duties. A new era was just opening upon the Hebrews, at the time when this address to them was delivered. They had, by the worshipping of the golden calf, entirely annulled the covenant which God had made with them, and had subjected themselves to his heavy displeasure. But, at the intercession of Moses, God had graciously renewed his covenant with them, by giving them again a copy of that Law which they had broken, and by committing them again to the care of Moses, whom he had appointed to conduct them to the land of Canaan. Now, therefore, Moses called on them to renew their solemn dedication of themselves to God, according to the tenor of those commandments which he had given them.

Somewhat of a similar era has commenced to us this day[a]. Many have been our offences in the past year: and God might have justly cast us off, and abandoned us to utter ruin. But he is now renewing to us his tender mercies: and may, therefore, justly call upon us to renew our surrender of ourselves to his service.

The words which I have just read to you will lead me to point out,

I. What God requires from us—

Israel had been redeemed from Egypt, and were regarded as a peculiar people unto the Lord. And such is our state. We have been redeemed from a far sorer bondage, by the blood of God's only dear

[a] This supposes that the subject is used on *New-Year's Day*.

Son; and by the very name we bear, we profess ourselves the followers of Christ, and the servants of the living God. Our duty, then, is "to serve our God," and to serve him in the very way prescribed in our text. We must serve him,

1. With reverential fear—

[Never for a moment must we forget that we are sinners, deserving of God's wrath and indignation. The circumstance of our having been forgiven by him, so far from removing all occasion for reverential fear, is rather a reason for the augmentation of it. We should "lothe ourselves the more because our God is pacified towards us[b];" for his very mercy shews how basely we have acted, in sinning against so good a God. If the glorified saints in heaven fall upon their faces before the throne, whilst yet they are singing praises to God and to the Lamb, much more should we on earth, who have yet so much corruption to mourn over, and so many evils to deplore. As for that kind of experience which some think to be warranted by their views of God's faithfulness to his promises, and which others derive from a conceit of their own sinless perfection, (I mean, that confidence, on the one hand, which is divested of fear; and that familiarity, on the other hand, which is not tempered with contrition,) I cannot but regard it as most delusive and dangerous. It would be well, too, if some, who are not carried to these extremes of *doctrinal* error be not equally defective, through a captious abhorrence of all forms in external discipline and deportment. Many, from a zeal against what they are pleased to designate as Popish superstition, conduct themselves with sad irreverence in the worship of the Most High: and, if they feel not already a contempt for the Majesty of heaven, sure I am that they take the most effectual means to generate it in their hearts. Men, as sinners, should lie low in the dust before God: and though, as redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ, they are to put away *slavish* fear, they are never for a moment to divest themselves of that fear which is *filial*, but to "walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long."]

2. With ardent love—

[A filial fear will not in the least degree impede the exercise of love; but will temper it with a becoming modesty and care. Blended with fear, it cannot possibly be too ardent. We should so "love our God, as to serve him with all our heart and with all our soul." In truth, without love, our obedience, however exact, would be nothing worth. Love is the crown of all. Even amongst men, it is love which constitutes

[b] Ezek. xvi. 63.

the essence of every acceptable service. We value not the efforts of friends by their intrinsic worth, so much as by the measure of affection displayed in them: and much more is this the standard by which the Almighty will try, and estimate, our services to him. It was this which rendered the widow's mite a more acceptable offering to God, than all the treasures of the opulent: and if only we give our whole souls to God, the very disposition to glorify him shall be equivalent to the act. We may not be able to do great things for him: but, if we have the desire, he will accept it, and say, "Thou didst well, in that it was in thine heart."]

3. With unreserved fidelity—

[There is to be no limit to our obedience; no line beyond which we will not go, if God call us. "No commandment is to be considered as grievous[c];" nor is any thing to be regarded as "a hard saying[d]." We are to "walk in *all* God's ways," obeying every commandment "without partiality and without hypocrisy." We are to "do his will on earth, even as it is done in heaven." Of the angels we are told, that "they do God's will, ***hearkening to the voice of his word.***" They look for the very first intimation of his will, and fly to execute it with all their might. They never for a moment consider what bearing the command may have on their own personal concerns: they find all their happiness in fulfilling the divine will. And this should be the state of our minds also: it should be "our meat and our drink to do the will of Him that sent us." And, if suffering be the recompence allotted us, we should "rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for His sake." Even life itself should not be dear to us in comparison of His honour; and we should be ready to lay it down, at any time, and in any way, that the sacrifice may be demanded of us.]

The text will lead me to shew you further,

II. The reasonableness and excellency of his requirements:—

That they are reasonable, is evident from the appeal which Moses makes respecting them—

[Two things are intimated in this appeal to Israel; the one, that these things were required of them; the other, that the requisitions were such as they could not but approve. If they only considered themselves as God's creatures, they could not but acknowledge that these services were due to him: but when they viewed the mercies that had been vouchsafed unto them, and the blessings which God had yet further in reserve

[c] 1 John v. 3. [d] John vi. 60.

for them, they could not doubt God's right to every return which it was in their power to make. How much stronger his claim is to *our* obedience, must be obvious to every considerate mind. Think of yourselves, Brethren, as redeemed from death and hell by the blood of God's only dear Son, and then say whether you are not bound to love and serve him with your whole hearts. Think how mercifully God has borne with your transgressions hitherto, (for you have been a stiff-necked people, even as Israel of old were:) think how your every want is still supplied, not only for the body, as theirs was, but for the soul, by the bread of life sent down from heaven, and by water from Christ Jesus, the stricken rock: think how mercifully God has committed you to the guidance of his own Son; and to what a glorious land he is leading you, even "a land flowing with milk and honey." Can you, in the contemplation of these things, doubt whether the entire surrender of your souls to God be "a reasonable service[e]?" Or rather say, whether the smallest wish to reduce or limit His claims would not be the most unreasonable thing that could enter into your minds?]

But the excellency of them also is equally apparent—

[Every command of God is given us "*for our good.*" There is not one which has not a direct tendency to make us happy. If they require us to subdue and mortify our indwelling corruptions, what is this, but to heal the diseases of our souls, and to restore us to the image of our God? If they require us to love and serve our God, what is this, but to bring us, so far as they are obeyed, to a foretaste of our heavenly inheritance? Who ever found an evil issuing out of a conformity to God's holy will? If it has brought a cross upon us, who has not found that very cross an occasion and a ground of more exalted joy? Were present happiness alone consulted, there is nothing in the universe that can advance it like the service of our God: but, if the future state be considered, and the augmented weight of glory which shall be accorded to us in proportion to our services, we may well say, that every command of God is good, and that "in keeping his commandments there is great reward."]

Let me now ADDRESS you, brethren, in a way,

1. Of faithful reproof—

[You all profess yourselves to be the "Israel" of God; and are convinced that your obligations to Jehovah are as much superior to those of the Jews, as your redemption and your destination are superior to theirs. But how have you

[e] Rom. xii. 1.

requited the Lord? Oh! compare your lives with what has been before spoken, and with what you cannot but acknowledge to have been your bounden duty. Which of you, in the retrospect, has not reason to blush and be ashamed?——— And as for the generality amongst us, is there not just ground to utter against them that complaint of the Prophet Jeremiah, "This thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you. But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imaginations of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward[f]?" In truth, this is but too faithful a picture of the generality amongst us. And what can be expected, but that God's wrath should break forth to the uttermost against such a sinful and rebellious generation?]

Let me then add a word,

2. Of affectionate admonition—

["I call heaven and earth to record this day against you all, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that ye may live[g]." You cannot but acknowledge that every thing which God requires of you is both good in itself, and conducive to your greatest good. "Observe, then, to do as the Lord your God hath commanded you: you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left[h]." You surely have every inducement to serve God that your hearts can wish. Oh, be not stiff-necked: be not like that faithless generation, respecting whom "God sware, in his wrath, that they should never enter into his rest:" but "to-day, while it is called to-day," devote yourselves altogether to His service! And "*then* shall ye not be ashamed, when ye have respect unto all his commandments[i]."]

[f] Jer. vii. 23, 24.
[g] Deut. xxx. 19, 20.
[h] Deut. v. 32.
[i] Ps. cxix. 6.

## CCII.

### THE ELECTING LOVE OF GOD AN INCENTIVE TO HOLINESS.

Deut. x. 14—16. *Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the Lord's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them; and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.*

THE true tendency of religion is marked in the words preceding our text. Under the Christian, no less than under the Jewish dispensation, it is altogether practical; so that in every age of the Church we may adopt that appeal of Moses, "And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" But we must not in our zeal for morals overlook those principles which alone have efficacy to produce them. The principles which call forth our hopes and our fears, have necessarily a powerful effect on our conduct: but a more refined operation is derived from those principles which excite our love and gratitude. The electing love of God, for instance, when brought home with a personal application to the soul, has a constraining influence, which nothing can resist. Hence Moses so often reminds the Israelites of their peculiar obligations to God, such as no other people from the beginning of the world could ever boast of: and takes occasion from those distinguishing favours to urge them the more powerfully to devote themselves to his service. What he considered as their duty we have already noticed: his mode of urging them to perform it comes now to be more particularly considered: "The Lord had a delight in thy fathers, &c.: circumcise *therefore*, &c."

From these words we shall shew,

I. That God's people are brought into that relation to him, not by any merits of their own, but solely in consequence of his electing love—

The whole universe, both "the heavens and the earth," is the Lord's: it owes its existence to his all-creating power; and it is altogether at his disposal. He has the same power over it as the potter has over the clay: and, if it had pleased him to mar, or to annihilate, any part of the creation, as soon as he had formed it, he had a right to do so.

But, whilst he has the same right over all his intelligent creatures, he has seen fit to bring some, and some only, into a nearer connexion with himself.

Into this state he brings them of his own sovereign will and pleasure—

[Abraham was an idolater, as all his family were, when God first called him by his grace; nor had he any more claim to the blessings promised him, than any other person whatsoever. Isaac was appointed to be the channel of these blessings in preference to Ishmael, long before he was born into the world: and Jacob also the younger was chosen before Esau the elder, "even whilst they were both yet in the womb, and consequently had done neither good nor evil." His posterity too was chosen to inherit the promised blessings. And why were they chosen? Was it for their superior goodness either seen or foreseen? It could not be for any thing seen; for they were yet unborn when the blessings were promised to them: and it could not be for any thing foreseen, for they proved a rebellious and stiff-necked people from the very first[a]. The selection of them can be traced to nothing but to God's sovereign will and pleasure[b].

In every age he has done the same. Those who love and serve God have always been a remnant only: but they have been "a remnant according to the election of grace." All true believers at this day, as well as in the apostolic age, must acknowledge, that "God has called them, not according to their works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given them in Christ Jesus before the world began[c]." It is "to the good pleasure of his will," and not to any thing in themselves, that they must ascribe the gift of their spiritual privileges, and spiritual attainments. No one of them can say, that he "made himself to differ," or that he possesses "any thing which he has not received." All that even the most eminent saints possess is a free unmerited gift from God.]

Moreover, in this exercise of his sovereign will and pleasure, he gives no just occasion of complaint to any—

[This exercise of his sovereignty is condemned by many, as being an act of injustice; since to choose some and to leave others gives to the chosen a preference which they do not deserve. But it must be remembered, that none had any claim upon God: and, if we had all been left, like the fallen angels, to endure the full consequences of our transgression, God would still have been holy and just and good: and, if for his

[a] Deut. ix. 13, 24. [b] Deut. vii. 6—8. [c] 2 Tim. i. 9.

own glory he has decreed to rescue any from destruction, he does no injury to any, nor is accountable to any for this display of his grace.

I well know that this doctrine is controverted by many. But the very persons who deny the doctrine of election, as applied to individuals, are constrained to acknowledge it in reference to nations. But where is the difference? if it is unjust in the one case, it is unjust in the other: if it is unjust to elect any to salvation, it is unjust to elect them to the means of salvation; those from whom he withholds the means, have the same ground of complaint as those from whom he withholds the end. It is nothing to say, that the injury is *less* in the one case than in the other: for if it be injurious at all, God would never have done it: but if it be not injurious at all, then does all opposition to the doctrine fall to the ground. The principle must be conceded or denied altogether. Denied it cannot be, because it is an unquestionable fact that God has exercised his sovereignty, and does still exercise it, in instances without number: and, if it be conceded, then is the objector silenced; and he must admit that God has a right to do what he will with his own.

Perhaps it may be said that election is, and has always been, conditional. But this is not true. As far as related to the possession of Canaan, the election of the Jews might be said to be conditional: but on what conditions was the election of Abraham, or of Isaac, or of Jacob, suspended? On what was the election of their posterity to the means of salvation suspended? On what conditions has God chosen us to enjoy the sound of the Gospel, in preference to millions of heathens, who have never been blessed with the light of revelation? The truth is, we know nothing of the doctrines of grace but as God has revealed them: and his choice of some to salvation now stands on the very same authority as his choice of others to the means of salvation in the days of old. If such an exercise of sovereignty was wrong then, it is wrong now: if it was right then, it is right now: and if it was right in respect to nations, it cannot be wrong in reference to individuals. The same principle which vindicates or condemns it in the one case, must hold good in the other also. The extent of the benefits conferred cannot change the nature of the act that confers them: it may cause *the measure* of good or evil that is in the act to vary: but *the intrinsic quality* of the act must in either case remain the same.]

That this doctrine may not appear injurious to morality, I proceed to observe,

II. That the circumstance of God's exercising this sovereignty is so far from weakening our obligation to good works, that it binds us the more

strongly to the performance of them. Moses says, "God has chosen you;" "circumcise *therefore* the foreskin of your heart." Here observe,

1. The duty enjoined—

[We are all by nature a rebellious and stiff-necked people. We wonder at the conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness: but in that we may see a perfect image of our own: we have not been obedient to God's revealed will. We have been alike rebellious, whether loaded with mercies, or visited with judgments. Light and easy as the yoke of Christ is, we have not taken it upon us, but have lived to the flesh and not to the Spirit, to ourselves, and not unto our God. But we must no longer proceed in this impious career: it is high time that we cast away the weapons of our rebellion, and humble ourselves before God. We must "be no more stiff-necked," but humble, penitent, obedient. Nor is it an outward obedience only that we must render to our God; we must "circumcise the foreskin of our hearts," mortifying every corrupt propensity, and "crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts." It must not be grievous to us to part with sin, however painful may be the act of cutting it off: we must cut off a right hand, and pluck out a right eye, and retain nothing that is displeasing to our God. There is no measure of holiness with which we should be satisfied: we should seek to "be pure even as Christ himself is pure," and to "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."]

2. The motive to the performance of it—

[To this duty the Jews are urged by the consideration of God's electing love, and of the distinguishing favours which he of his own sovereign grace and mercy had vouchsafed unto them.

And what more powerful motive could Moses urge than this? It was not to make them happy in a way of sin that God had chosen them, but to make them "a holy nation, a peculiar people, zealous of good works:" and, if they did not follow after universal holiness, they would counteract the designs of his providence and grace. They would deprive themselves also of the blessings provided for them. For it was only in the way of obedience that God could ever finally accept them. And thus it is with us also: we are "chosen unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them:" and it is only "by a patient continuance in well-doing that we can ever attain eternal life." We are "chosen to salvation," it is true; but it is "through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:" and it is in that way only that we can ever attain the end.

But there is another view in which the consideration of God's electing love should operate powerfully on our hearts to the production of universal holiness; namely, by filling our souls with lively gratitude to him, and an ardent desire to requite him in the way that he himself directs. There is nothing under heaven that can constrain a pious soul like a sense of redeeming love. Let any one that has been "brought out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel, and been turned from the power of Satan unto God," look around him, and see how many, not of heathens only, but of professed Christians also, are yet in the darkness of nature and the bonds of sin; and then let him recollect who it is that has made him to differ both from them and from his former self; and will not that make him cry out, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me?" Yes, that view of his obligations to God will so inflame and penetrate his soul, that its utmost energies will from thenceforth be employed in honouring his adorable Benefactor.

This we say is the true and proper tendency of the doctrine in our text. The Jews, if they had justly appreciated the favours vouchsafed to them, would have been the holiest of all people upon earth: and so will Christians be, if once they be sensible of the obligations conferred upon them by God's electing and redeeming love.]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let those who are zealous about duties, not be forgetful of their obligations—

[It is frequently found that persons altogether hostile to all the doctrines of grace, profess a great regard for the interests of morality. I stop not at present to inquire how far their professions are realized in practice: all I intend, is, simply to suggest, that high and holy affections are necessary to all acceptable obedience; and that those affections can only be excited in us by a sense of our obligations to God. If we attempt to lessen those obligations, we weaken and paralyse our own exertions. If we have been forgiven much, we shall love much: if we have received much, we shall return the more. If then it be only for the sake of that morality about which you profess so much concern, we would say to the moralist, Search into the mysteries of sovereign grace, and of redeeming love. If without the knowledge of them you may *walk* to a certain degree uprightly, you can never *soar* into the regions of love and peace and joy: your obedience will be rather that of a servant, than a son; and you will never acquire that delight in God, which is the duty and privilege of the believing soul.]

2. Let those who boast of their obligations to God not be inattentive to their duties—

[They who "cry, Lord, Lord, and neglect to do the things which he commands," miserably deceive their own souls. And it must be confessed that such self-deceivers do exist, and ever have existed in the Church of God. But let those who glory in the deeper *doctrines* of religion bear in mind, that nothing can supersede an observance of its *duties:* for "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God[d]." That is a solemn admonition which God has given to us all: "Circumcise yourselves unto the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah, and inhabitants of Jerusalem, lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it[e]." It is not by our professions, but by our practice, that we shall be judged in the last day. We may say to our Lord in the last day, that we have not only gloried in him, but "in his name done many wonderful works;" yet will he say to us, "Depart from me, I never knew you," if we shall then be found to have been workers of iniquity. To all then who account themselves the elect of God, I say, Let the truth of your principles be seen in the excellence of your works: and, as you profess to be more indebted to God than others, let the heavenliness of your minds and the holiness of your lives be proportionably sublime and manifest: for it is in this way only that you can approve yourselves to God, or justify your professions in the sight of man.]

[d] Rom. ii. 28, 29. [e] Jer. iv. 4.

## CCIII.

### THE SCRIPTURES RECOMMENDED TO US.

Deut. xi. 18—21. *Therefore shall ye lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes. And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thine house, and upon thy gates: that your days may be multiplied, and the days of your children, in the land which the Lord sware unto your fathers to give them, as the days of heaven upon the earth.*

TO have the holy oracles in our hands is one of the greatest advantages that we enjoy above the heathen[a]: a due improvement of them therefore will be expected of us. The Jews, who were in like manner distinguished above all other nations upon earth, were required to shew the most affectionate, obediential regard to the writings of Moses. But the injunctions given to them with respect to the revelation they possessed, are still more obligatory on us, who have the sacred canon completed, and, by the superior light of the New Testament, are enabled to enter more fully into its mysterious import.

The words which we have just read, point out to us,

I. Our duty with respect to the word of God—

A revelation from heaven cannot but demand our most serious attention—

1. We should treasure it up in our hearts—

[It is not sufficient to study the Scriptures merely as we read other books; we must search into them for hid treasures[b], and lay up "in our hearts," yea, in our inmost "souls," the glorious truths which they unfold to our view; and be careful never to let them slip[c]. They should be our delight, and our meditation all the day[d].]

2. We should make it a frequent subject of our conversation—

[It is to be regretted that there is no other subject so universally proscribed and banished, as that of religion. But, if we loved God as we ought, we could not but love to speak of his word, that word which is our light in this dark world, and the one foundation of all our hopes. When Moses and Elias came from heaven to converse with our Lord, the prophecies relating to the sufferings and glory of Christ were their one topic of discourse[e]. Thus at all times and places should our conversation be seasoned with salt[f], and tend to the use of edifying[g]. If it were thus with us, God would listen to us with approbation[h], and Jesus would often come and unite himself to our company[i].]

3. We should bring it on all occasions to our remembrance—

[a] Rom. iii. 2. [b] Prov. ii. 1—4. [c] Heb. ii. 1.
[d] Ps. cxix. 92, 97. [e] Luke ix. 30, 31. [f] Col. iv. 6.
[g] Eph. iv. 29. [h] Mal. iii. 16, 17. [i] Luke xxiv. 14, 15.

[The Jews, putting a literal construction on the passage before us, wrote portions of God's word on scraps of parchment, and wore them as *bracelets* on their wrists, and as *frontlets* on their heads. But we shall more truly answer the end of this commandment by consulting the Scriptures on all occasions as our sure and only guide, and making them (N.B.) THE ONE RULE OF OUR FAITH AND PRACTICE. There are many general precepts and promises which we should have continually in view, as much as if they were fixed on our doors and gates; which also, as if fastened on our foreheads and our hands, should both direct our way, and regulate our actions.]

4. We should instruct the rising generation in the knowledge of it—

[All are solicitous to teach their children some business, whereby they may provide a maintenance for their bodies: and should we not endeavour to instruct them in the things relating to their souls? Abraham was particularly commended for his care with respect to this[k]: and the injunction in the text, confirmed by many other passages[l], requires that we should "diligently" perform this duty. Nor should we imagine that the mere teaching of children to repeat a catechism will suffice: we should open to them all the wonders of redemption, and endeavour to cast their minds, as it were, into the very mould of the Gospel.]

In the close of the text we are directed to bear in mind,

II. Our encouragement to fulfil this duty—

This unfeigned love to the Scriptures will be productive of the greatest good:

1. It will tend greatly to our present happiness—

[A peaceful enjoyment of the promised land, and of all the good things of this life, was held forth to the Jews as the reward of their obedience: but *we* are taught rather to look forward to the possession of a better country, that is, an heavenly. Nevertheless, "godliness has at this time also the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come[m]:" and therefore we may properly consider the present benefits arising from a due attention to the Scriptures. Suppose then that the blessed word of God were regarded by us as it ought to be, that it engaged our affections, entered into our conversation, regulated our conduct, and were instilled into the minds of the rising generation, would not much light, obscene,

[k] Gen. xviii. 19. [l] Exod. xiii. 8, 14—16. Ps. lxxviii. 5—8.
[m] 1 Tim. iv. 8.

and impious discourse be suppressed? Would not sin of every kind receive a salutary check? Would not many of the diseases, the troubles, the feuds, and the miseries that result from sin, be prevented? Would not many of the judgments of God which now desolate the earth, the wars, the famines, the pestilences, be removed[n]? Would not, in numberless instances, knowledge be diffused, consolation administered, and virtue called forth into act and exercise? Would not our children, as they grow up, reap the benefit of such examples[o]? Let any one judge impartially, and say, whether a due regard to the Scriptures would not greatly meliorate the state of society, and of every individual, in proportion as his life was conformed to them[p]?]

2. It will secure an inheritance beyond the grave—

[The earthly Canaan was typical of heaven; when therefore we see the possession of that good land promised to the Jews, we must, in applying the promises to ourselves, raise our views to the Canaan that is above. Now what are the means which God has prescribed for the securing of that glorious inheritance? Certainly an attention to the Scriptures is that one mean, without which we never can attain to happiness, and in the use of which we cannot but attain it. It is by the Scriptures that God quickens us[q], and brings us first into his family[r]. It is by them that he directs our way[s], and keeps our feet[t], and sanctifies our hearts[u], and makes us wise unto salvation[x], and gives us a very "heaven upon earth."

And shall not the hope of such benefits allure us? When we have eternal life in the Scriptures, shall we not search them[y], yea, and meditate upon them day and night[z]? Let then the word be sweeter to us than honey or the honey-comb[a], and be esteemed by us more than our necessary food[b].][c]

[n] ver. 13—17. [o] Prov. xxii. 6. [p] Ps. xix. 11.
[q] Ps. xix. 7, 8. and cxix. 50.
[r] Jam. i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 23. See also Acts viii. 28—39.
[s] Ps. cxix. 105. [t] Ps. cxix. 9, 11. and xxxvii. 31.
[u] Eph. v. 26. [x] 2 Tim. iii. 15. [y] John v. 39.
[z] Ps. i. 2. [a] Ps. xix. 10. [b] Job xxiii. 12.

[c] If this were the subject of a Sermon for *Sunday Schools*, or *Charity Schools*, or the *distribution of Bibles and religious tracts*, an APPLICATION, suited to the occasion, should be added.

## CCIV.

### THE GREAT ALTERNATIVE.

Deut. xi. 26—28. *Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the*

*Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God.*

ON whatever occasion these words had been spoken, they must have appeared most weighty, and most important: but, as the parting address of Moses to the whole nation of Israel, when he was about to be withdrawn from them, they have a force and emphasis that can scarcely be exceeded. Imagine the aged servant of Jehovah, who, forty years before, had delivered to their fathers the law written with the finger of God, and who had lived to see the utter extinction of that rebellious generation for their transgressions against it; imagine him, I say, now affectionately warning this new generation, with all the solicitude of a father, and all the fidelity of one who was about to give up an immediate account of his stewardship. In this view, the words inspire us with solemn awe, and impress us with a fearful sense of our responsibility to God. May God accompany them with a divine energy to our souls, whilst we consider,

I. The awful alternative proposed to us—

As addressed to the Jews, these words may be understood as containing the terms of their national covenant, in which the blessings promised them depended on their obedience to the divine commands. But if we enter fully into the subject, we shall find it replete with instruction to us also, especially as exhibiting to our view the Christian covenant. Let us consider,

1. The fuller explanation which Moses himself gave of this alternative—

[The blessing and the curse are more fully stated in the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth chapters of this book. But to what is the blessing annexed? to an unreserved obedience to *all* God's commandments[a]. And against what is the curse denounced? not only against some particular and more flagrant transgressions[b], but against any single deviation from the law of God, however small, however inadvertent[c]: and all the

[a] Deut. xxviii. 1. [b] Deut. xxvii. 15—25. [c] Deut. xxvii. 26.

people were required to give their consent to these terms, acknowledging the justice of them, and professing their willingness to be dealt with according to them[d]. Now, I ask, who could obtain salvation on such terms as these? who could even venture to indulge a hope of ultimate acceptance with his God? It is obvious, that according to these terms the whole human race must perish. But was this the design of God in publishing such a covenant? Did he intend to mock his creatures with offers of mercy on terms which it was impossible to perform, and then to require of them a public acknowledgment of their approbation of them? No: he intended at this very time to shew them their need of a better covenant, and, in reality, to point out that very covenant for their acceptance. He intended to shew them, that, however in their national capacity they might secure a continuance of his favour by an observance of his commands, they could never attain eternal blessedness in such a way: they must look to their Messiah for the removal of the curses, which, according to their own acknowledgment, they merited; and obtain through him those blessings, which they would in vain attempt to earn by any merits of their own.

That this is the true scope of those chapters, will appear from the light thrown upon them by St. Paul; who quotes the very words of Moses which we have been considering, and declares, that, according to them, every human being is under a curse, and is therefore necessitated to look to Christ who became a "curse" for us, and to expect a "blessing" through him alone[e].]

But this will receive additional light by considering,

2. The peculiar circumstances attending the publication of it—

[It was particularly commanded by Moses, that as soon as that portion of the promised land on which Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim stood should be subdued, an altar of whole stones should be erected to the Lord; that it should be plastered over; that the law should be written in very large and legible characters upon it; that burnt-offerings and peace-offerings should be offered upon it; that the terms of the covenant should be recited in the hearing of all the people; that the blessings should be pronounced on Mount Gerizim, and the curses on Mount Ebal; and that all the people should give their public assent to the whole and every part of that covenant[f].

Now, whilst this command was a pledge to the people of their future success, it was an intimation to them, that the work of covenanting with God should take precedence of every

[d] Deut. xxvii. 26. [e] Gal. iii. 10, 13, 14. [f] Deut. xxvii. 2—8.

other; and that, whatever were their occupations, whatever their difficulties, they must on no account forget to serve and honour God. Accordingly, as soon as Joshua had conquered Jericho and Ai, and had obtained possession of that spot of ground, notwithstanding he was surrounded by enemies on every side, he convoked the people, and complied with the divine command in every respect: "there was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the congregation of Israel[g]."

But wherefore were these burnt-offerings to be offered on the occasion? and how could the people "eat their peace-offerings there, and rejoice before the Lord[h]?" Methinks, if they were ratifying a covenant by which they could never obtain a blessing, and by which they must perish under a curse, there was little reason to "*rejoice.*" But these burnt-offerings were to direct their attention to the great sacrifice, by which all their curses should be removed, and all the blessings of salvation be secured to them. In the view of that great sacrifice, they might hear all the curses published, and feel no cause of dread or apprehension: in the view of that sacrifice, they might contemplate the imperfections of their obedience without despondency; yea, they might "eat their peace-offerings" in token of their acceptance with God, and might "rejoice in him with joy unspeakable and glorified." By this sacrifice they were taught, not to confine their views to the Law, but to extend them to the Gospel: and, in the terms to which they assented, they were taught to include *obedience to the Gospel*[i], even to that great "commandment of God, which enjoins us to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ[k]." To this *we* also may assent; yea, to this we *must* assent: and we now set before you the blessing and the curse; we now propose to you the great alternative: If ye will obey the commandments of the Lord, believing in his only dear Son as the only ground of your hopes, and, from a sense of love to him, endeavouring unreservedly to fulfil his will, we promise you, in the name of Almighty God, a fulness of all spiritual and eternal blessings: but, if ye will not *thus* obey his commandments, we declare to you, that the curse of God shall rest upon your souls in time and in eternity.]

Such being the alternative proposed to us, we would set before you,

II. Some reflections arising from it—

We cannot but notice from hence,

[g] Josh. viii. 30—35. [h] Deut. xxvii. 7.
[i] 2 Thess. i. 8. [k] John vi. 29. and 1 John iii. 23.

1. That ministers must faithfully execute their high office—

[It was not from a want of tenderness that Moses thus faithfully declared the whole counsel of God, but because his duty to God, and to the people also, constrained him to declare it: and there is something peculiarly instructive in the directions he gave respecting the delivery of the blessing and the curse from the two contiguous mounts. Six of the tribes were to be stationed on the one mount, and six on the other: those who were born of the free-women, were to be on Mount Gerizim; and those who were of the bond-women, together with Reuben, who had been degraded, and Zebulun, the youngest of Leah's children, (to make the numbers equal,) were to be on Mount Ebal, from whence the curses were to proceed. The tribe of Levi then were, where we should expect to find them, on the side from whence the blessings were pronounced[l]. This shewed, that, whilst the liberty of the Gospel led to true blessedness, it was the true end and scope of the ministry to make men blessed[m]: *that* is the delightful employment of the sons of Levi: the highest character of a pious minister is, to be "a helper of your joy." But it was ordered that some of the Levites should also be stationed on Mount Ebal to pronounce the curses[n]; because, however painful it may be to ministers to exhibit the terrors of the law, the necessities of men require it, and the duties of their office demand it. Let us not then be thought harsh, if on proper occasions we make known to you the dangers of disobedience: "a necessity is imposed upon us; and woe be to us if we decline" executing the commission we have received. We must "*warn* every man, as well as *teach* every man, if we would present every man perfect in Christ Jesus[o]." It would be a more pleasing task to dwell only on the brighter side, and to speak to you only from Mount Gerizim; but we must occasionally stand also on Mount Ebal, and make you to hear the more awful part of the alternative which we are commissioned to propose. The message which we must deliver to every creature that is under heaven, consists of these two parts, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned."]

2. That faith and works are equally necessary to our salvation, though on different grounds—

[God forbid that for one moment we should attempt to lessen the importance and necessity of good works: they are

[l] Deut. xxvii. 11—13.
[m] Deut. x. 8.
[n] Deut. xxvii. 14, 15.
[o] Col. i. 28.

indispensably necessary to our salvation: they are as necessary under the Gospel, as under the law: the only difference is, that, according to the strict tenor of the law, they were the ground of our hope; whereas, under the Gospel, they are the fruits and evidences of our faith. To found our hopes of salvation on our obedience to the holy law of God, would, as we have before seen, cut off all possibility of salvation; because our obedience must be *perfect*, in order to secure the promised "blessing;" and *every* act of disobedience has entailed on us an everlasting "curse:" but, if we comprehend, in our views of obedience, an obedience to the Gospel; if we comprehend in it the trusting in Christ for salvation, and the free endeavours of the soul to serve and honour him; then we may adopt the words of our text, and address them confidently to every living man. But then we must not forget, that it is the atoning sacrifice of Christ that alone enables us to hear even such a proposal with any degree of comfort. We can no more yield a *perfect* obedience to the Gospel, than we could to the Law: our faith is imperfect, as well as our works: but, if we seek reconciliation with God through the death of his Son, we shall have peace with him, and may eat our peace-offering with confidence and joy. In our views of this subject, we need only set before our eyes that solemn transaction, to which we have referred: we shall there see, on what all the hopes of Israel were founded, namely, the sacrifice of Christ: we shall see at the same time, to what all Israel were bound, namely, a life of holy and unreserved obedience. It is precisely thus with ourselves; our obedience does not supersede the necessity of faith; nor does our faith set aside the necessity of obedience: one is the root, and the other is the fruit; one is the foundation, the other is the superstructure; one is the means of acceptance with God, the other is the means of honouring him and of adorning our holy profession.]

3. That happiness or misery is the fruit of our own choice—

[The very proposal of an alternative implies a choice: but this choice is yet intimated in a subsequent passage to the same effect[p]: nor can there be any doubt but that every man is called to make his election; and that his eternal state is fixed agreeably to the choice he makes. Not that we mean to set aside the election of God; for we know full well, that God's people are "a remnant according to the election of grace[q];" and that "it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy[r]." Nevertheless, no man is brought to heaven against his own will. He has felt the attractive influences of divine grace, and has been "made

[p] Deut. xxx. 15, 19. [q] Rom. xi. 5. [r] Rom. ix. 15, 16.

willing in the day of God's power[s]." He is drawn indeed, but it is "with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love." On the other hand, no man is sentenced to misery, who has not first chosen the ways of sin. He perishes, not because God has "ordained him to wrath[t]," but because "he will not come to Christ that he may have life[u]." Christ would gladly have "gathered him, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but *he* would not."

It may be said perhaps, that, whilst we thus attempt to vindicate the justice of God, we countenance the workings of pride in man. But we have no fear that any one who has been drawn by the Spirit of God, will ever ascribe his conversion to the operations of his own natural will: he will readily own, that "it is God, who of his own good pleasure has given him both to will and to do[x];" and that it is "by the grace of God he is what he is." On the other hand, all excuse is cut off from the ungodly: they must ever take the whole blame of their condemnation to themselves, and never presume to cast the least atom of it upon God.

Make ye then your choice, beloved Brethren: we this day set before you life and death, a blessing and a curse: choose ye therefore life, that your souls may live. God has declared that "he willeth not the death of any sinner: therefore turn yourselves, and live ye[y]." In his sacred name I promise to the righteous, that "it shall be well with him; but I denounce a woe unto the wicked, for it shall be ill with him, and the reward of his hands shall be given to him[z]."]

[s] Ps. cx. 3. [t] 1 Thess. v. 9. [u] John v. 40. [x] Phil. ii. 13.
[y] Ezek. xviii. 32. and xxxiii. 11. [z] Isai. iii. 10, 11.

## CCV.

### THE PROHIBITION OF EATING BLOOD.

Deut. xii. 23—25. *Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh: thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water: thou shalt not eat it, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, when thou shalt do that which is right in the sight of the Lord.*

THERE are many injunctions in the Mosaic law, which appear to have been given with more solemnity than their comparative importance demands: nor can we account for the stress laid upon them, but by supposing them to have had a typical reference. What is here said, for instance, respecting the eating

of blood, if we consider it as intended only to give an oblique hint of the duties of humanity and self-denial, is delivered in a far more emphatical manner than we should expect such an intimation to be given: for though a plain precept relating to them might fitly be enjoined in the strongest terms, and enforced by the strongest sanctions, it is not to be conceived that the image by which they would be shadowed forth, should be made to assume such an important aspect. If we mark the force and energy with which the prohibition of eating blood is here repeated, we shall be well persuaded that it contains some deeper mystery, which demands our most attentive consideration. But as, from the strength of the expressions, we may be ready to imagine that it is still binding upon *us*, we feel it necessary to guard against that mistake; and shall therefore consider,

I. The prohibition given—

*The manner in which it was given,* must by no means be overlooked—

[There is not in all the sacred volume any prohibition or command delivered more *peremptorily* than this. Four times it is repeated even in the short space of our text, "Thou mayest not eat of it; Thou shalt not eat of it; Be sure thou eat not of it." The *frequency* too with which it is received in the Scriptures is truly astonishing. When first the use of animals for food was permitted to Noah, the grant was accompanied with this restriction, "But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat[a]." By Moses the restriction is repeated again, and again[b]. The *sanctions with which it is enforced* are also peculiarly awful. Not only was the prosperity of the people suspended on their obedience to this command[c], but they were threatened with the most tremendous vengeance, if they should presume to violate it: "I will set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people[d]." Even if they took in hunting or caught by any means a beast or fowl, they must "pour its blood upon the earth as water, and *cover it with dust*[e]:" and all these injunctions must be *observed by all*, by strangers and sojourners

[a] Gen. ix. 3, 4.
[b] Lev. iii. 16, 17. and vii. 26, 27. Deut. xv. 23. and several other places.
[c] See the text.
[d] Read attentively Lev. xvii. 10—14.
[e] Ibid.

as well as natives. Now I ask, Would this prohibition have been so *peremptorily*[f] *given*, so *frequently repeated*, so *solemnly enforced*; would *such particular directions have been added*; and would they have been made so *universally binding*, if there had been nothing mysterious in this appointment?]

We may be sure that *the grounds of it* are deserving of the deepest investigation—

[We speak not of such grounds as might *probably* exist, such as those before referred to, namely, the promotion of humanity and self-denial, (though in both these views the prohibition may be considered as highly instructive;) but of those grounds which we *know assuredly* to have been the principal, if not the only, object of the institution.

We must remember, that offerings were by the divine appointment presented from time to time as an atonement for sin; that the blood of those offerings being, as it were, the life of the animals, was considered as exclusively prevailing for the remission of sins; and that on that very account it was poured out upon the altar, in token, that it was presented to God as an expiation for iniquity, and was accepted by him instead of the life of the offender.

We must remember also, that all these offerings had respect to the sacrifice of Christ, which was in due time to be offered for the sins of the whole world.

Now it was of infinite importance that the highest possible veneration should be instilled into the minds of men for the offerings which they presented to God; and that they should be deeply impressed with a consciousness of their mysterious reference to the sacrifice of Christ. But, if they had been permitted to eat of blood, this reverence would have quickly abated: whereas by the strictness of the prohibition, it was kept alive in their minds: and even their common meals were rendered an occasion of bringing to their recollection the use of blood in their offerings, and the efficacy of that blood which was at a future period to be poured out upon the cross.

Here then was a reason for the prohibition; a reason, which accounts at once for the strictness, the frequency, the vehemence, with which it was given, and for the tremendous sanctions with which it was enforced. Nothing could be unimportant that had such a reference: and the more insignificant the prohibited thing was in itself, the more need there was that all possible weight should be given to it by the manner of its prohibition.]

But we shall not have a complete view of the subject, unless we consider,

[f] Read attentively Lev. xvii. 10—14.

II. The prohibition reversed—

It is reversed, as it relates to the use of blood—

[To the first converts indeed it was enjoined, that they should abstain from the use of blood[g], no less than from fornication itself: and hence it has been supposed that there was a moral evil in the one, as well as in the other; and that, consequently, the prohibition still equally exists against both. But this is by no means the case. There was a necessity at that time to prohibit fornication, because the Gentile converts, who had been habituated from their youth to regard it as allowable, and in some instances even to practise it in their idolatrous worship, were still in a great measure insensible of its moral turpitude. *They* therefore needed to be more clearly informed respecting that sin, and to be cautioned against it: whilst *we*, having been educated with clearer views and better habits, are well aware of the sinfulness of such a practice. There was also a need to prohibit the eating of blood, because the Jews, who had been accustomed to regard the use of it with such abhorrence, would have been greatly offended when they saw Christians taking so great a liberty in direct opposition to what they considered as the law of God. On this account it was thought right to continue the prohibition for a time, that they might not shock the prejudices of the Jewish nation. But St. Paul assures us repeatedly that another part of this same prohibition was revoked: and declares that the circumstance of meat having been offered unto idols does not render it unfit for a Christian's use, provided he see the liberty into which the Gospel has brought him[h]. In like manner he declares, that "there is nothing unclean of itself," but that "to the pure all things are pure[i]." Hence we are sure, that the prohibition in our text is reversed.]

It is reversed also in a far higher sense—

[The real intent of the offerings under the Old Testament is abundantly declared in the New: and the blood of Christ which was once shed on Calvary for the remission of sins, is uniformly represented as the great Antitype to which all the types referred. Now it is true, that that *material* blood cannot be drunk by us: but *in a spiritual sense* it may. Do I say, It *may?* I must add, It *must:* we are *required* to drink it: and the command is enforced with sanctions still more solemn than those by which the prohibition in our text was enforced. Let us attend to the words of Christ himself: "Except ye eat the flesh of Christ and *drink his blood*, ye have no life in you. He that eateth my flesh and *drinketh my blood*, hath eternal life: for my flesh is meat indeed, and *my blood is*

[g] Acts xv. 20, 29. [h] 1 Cor. viii. 4, 8.
[i] Rom. xiv. 14, 20. 1 Tim. iv. 4, 5.

*drink* indeed[k]." Here the command is as universal, as, before, the prohibition was. Need we to explain this to any of you? We would hope, there are few so ignorant as not to know what was designed by our blessed Lord: he meant, that, as he was about to give himself as an offering and a sacrifice for sin, we must all *believe in him* as the only Saviour of the world, and *apply to ourselves* all the benefits of his atonement.

But lest this injunction of his should be forgotten, he actually instituted an ordinance, wherein he appointed wine to be drunk in remembrance of his blood, and expressly said of the cup, when he put it into the hands of his disciples, "This is my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins; drink *ye all* of this[l]." And St. Paul explaining the reason of this ordinance, observes, that it was instituted in order that we might "shew forth the Lord's death, till he come[m]." Here then we see that the prohibition under the Old Testament, and the command under the New, have one and the same object: the prohibition was to call the attention of men to the death of the Messiah at his first advent; and the command is, to keep up the remembrance of his death till his second advent. The ends of the prohibition are the same, whether we consider it as *given*, or as *reversed:* and the duty of every living creature is pointed out, that we must look unto the blood of our great Sacrifice as the only means of reconciliation with our offended God[n]. *In reference to that* therefore we must say, "Be sure thou eat the blood: thou *mayest* eat; and thou *shalt* eat it, that it may go well with thee."]

As an IMPROVEMENT of this subject, we beg leave to add a few words of ADVICE:

1. Think not light of any sin—

[The Jews might readily have said, "What need is there of being so particular about getting out all the blood? the meat will be improved by retaining some of it; and no injury will be done to any one." We read indeed on one occasion, that they acted upon this presumption: they had taken great spoils from the Philistines, and were so eager to get some refreshment, that they overlooked in their haste the divine command. But was this deemed a just excuse for their conduct? No: they were severely reproved for it; and all the people were commanded to take their cattle to be slaughtered at a particular place, where the observance of this law might be scrutinized and secured[o]. Let not *us* then presume to set aside any of God's commands, however small they may appear, or whatever reasons we may have to extenuate the violation of

[k] John vi. 53—55. [l] Matt. xxvi. 27, 28.
[m] 1 Cor. xi. 25, 26. [n] Col. i. 14, 20. Heb. ix. 22. Rom. iii. 25.
[o] 1 Sam. xiv. 31—34.

them. In fact, the commission of every sin very much resembles this of which we are speaking. God has allowed us every species of gratification, if we will take it in the way and manner prescribed by him: but we say, 'No; I will have it in my own way; I will not be content with the flesh, but I will have the blood. I will not indeed drink it in bowls; but I will reserve a little of it to improve the flavour of my food.' What should we think of a Jew that would deliberately provoke God to anger, and bring ruin on his own soul, for such a gratification as this? Yet such is the conduct of every sinner; and such are the gratifications for which he sells his soul. O remember, that, if we could gain the whole world at the expence of our own souls, we should make a sad exchange. Be careful therefore not only not to violate any command of God, but not to lower in any one particular the standard of his law: for, "if in one thing only you deliberately and allowedly offend, you are guilty of all[p]," and infallibly subject yourselves to his everlasting displeasure.]

2. Above all things, think not light of the blood of Christ—

[The means used to beget a reverence for the blood which only shadoweth it forth, may clearly shew us what reverential thoughts we ought to entertain of the atoning blood of Christ. In *that* is all our hope: "by *that* alone we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins: through *that* the vilest sinner in the universe may obtain mercy; for it is able to "cleanse us from *all* sin." It is of *that* the hosts of heaven are making mention continually before the throne of God: their anthems are addressed "to Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in *his own blood*." Of that then should we also sing; and in that should we glory. But if we be disposed to disregard it, let us contemplate the fate of him who disregarded the typical injunction; "God declared, that he would set his face against him and cut him off." The proper reflection to be made on that, is suggested to us by God himself: "If he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing[q]?" It was terrible to "die without mercy;" but there is a "much sorer punishment" than that: there is a "second death," which they shall suffer, who trample on the blood of Christ. The Lord grant that we may never turn the means of happiness into an occasion of so great a calamity! Let us rather take the cup of salvation into our hands, and drink it with the liveliest emotions of gratitude and joy.]

[p] Jam. ii. 10. [q] Heb. x. 29.

## CCVI.

### THE JEWS' LEADING OBJECTION TO CHRISTIANITY CONSIDERED.

Deut. xiii. 1—3. *If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.*

IT has commonly, and with justice, been thought, that the two great pillars on which a revelation from God must stand, are, miracles, and prophecies. Without these, we cannot be assured, that any discovery which may have been made to man, is really divine. The points that are traced to a divine origin may be highly reasonable and excellent in themselves; yet, before they are clothed with a divine authority, we very properly ask, What proof is there that they are from God? what evidence do you give that they are not the offspring of your own mind? If they are from God, I take for granted that God does not leave you without witness: tell me then, what works do you perform, which no created power can perform; or what other credentials have you, whereby your heavenly mission may be known? If you can foretell things to come, I shall then know that you are from God; because none but God can certainly foreknow them: or if you can work things above, and contrary to the course of nature, then I shall know that you have that power from on high; because no created being can impart it.

This, I say, is the established mode of judging concerning a revelation from God: and, according as any thing professing to be from God is thus confirmed, or not, we give to it, or withhold from it, our assent. It is from grounds like these that we judge of the revelation given to Moses; and from similar grounds must we judge of the truth of Christianity also.

We must indeed inspect the matter of the thing revealed, to see whether it be worthy of him from

whom it is said to come; and from its internal evidence our faith will derive great strength: but still in the first instance we look rather to external proofs, such as we have before spoken of.

But the Jews imagine that they are precluded from judging of Christianity on such grounds as these, since Moses, in the passage we have just read, guards them against any such inferences as we are led to draw from the prophecies and miracles on which our religion is founded. He concedes that some prophecies may be uttered, and some miracles be wrought, in favour of a false religion; and that, even if that should be the case, the Jews are not to regard any evidences arising from those sources, but to hold fast their religion in opposition to them.

This is an objection commonly urged among the Jews, when we invite them to embrace the Christian religion. That we may meet it fairly, we will, first, state the objection in all its force, and then give what we apprehend to be the proper answer to it.

I. We begin then with stating the objection; and we will do it in such a way as to give the Jew all possible advantage.

The scope of the passage is to guard the Jews against idolatry. They were, and would continue to be, surrounded by idolatrous nations, who would strive to the utmost to draw them from Jehovah to the worship of false gods. And the Jews themselves having from the earliest period of their existence as a people been accustomed to see the idolatrous worship of Egypt, were of themselves strongly attached to idolatry; so that it was necessary to guard them against it by the most awful menaces, and the most impressive cautions.

The caution here given is certainly most solemn. That we may give it all the force of which it is capable, we will notice distinctly these three things; The supposition here made; The injunction given notwithstanding that supposition; and The argument founded on that injunction.

First, mark the supposition here made, namely,

that God may permit miraculous and prophetic powers to be exercised even in support of a false religion. We are not indeed to imagine that God himself will work miracles in order to deceive his people, and lead them astray; nor are we to imagine that he will suffer Satan to work them in such an unlimited way as to be a counterbalance to the miracles by which God has confirmed his own religion: but he will, for reasons which we shall presently consider, permit *some* to be wrought, and *some* prophecies to come to pass, notwithstanding they are designed to uphold an imposture. The magicians of Pharaoh, we must confess, wrought real miracles. When they changed their rods into serpents, it was not a deception, but a reality: and when they inflicted plagues upon Egypt after the example of Moses, it was not a deception, but a reality: but at the same time that they thus, in appearance, vied with Moses himself, and with Jehovah, in whose name he came, there was abundant evidence of their inferiority to Moses, and of their being under the control of a superior power: for the magicians could not remove one of the plagues which they themselves had produced; nor could they continue to imitate Moses in *all* the exercises of his power (from whence they themselves were led to confess their own inferiority to him); nor could they avert from themselves the plagues which Moses inflicted on them in common with the rest of the Egyptians. They were permitted to do so much as should give Pharaoh an occasion for hardening his own heart, but not sufficient to shew that they could at all come in competition with Moses.

In every age there were also false prophets, who endeavoured to draw the people from their allegiance to God; and in the multitude of prophecies that they would utter, it must be naturally supposed that *some* would be verified in the event. Our blessed Lord has taught us to expect, even under the Christian dispensation, that some efforts of this kind will be made by "Antichrist, whose coming is after the

working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish[a]." He has moreover told us that these false prophets should "shew such signs and wonders as to deceive, if it were possible, the very elect[b]:" nay more, that in the last day some will appeal to him respecting the prophecies they have uttered, and the miracles they have wrought in his name, and will plead them in arrest of judgment[c]. We may therefore safely concede what is here supposed, namely, that God may suffer miraculous and prophetic powers to be exercised to a certain degree even in support of idolatry itself.

Now then, in the next place, let us notice the injunction given to the Jews notwithstanding this supposition. God commands them "not to give heed to that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, even though his predictions should be verified, if his object be to turn them from him; for that he himself suffers these illusions to be practised upon them, in order that their fidelity to him may be tried, and their love to him approved."

It may seem strange that God should suffer such stumbling-blocks to be cast in the way of his people: but it is not for us to say what Jehovah may, or may not, do: we are sure that "he tempteth no man," so as to lead him into sin[d], and that the "Judge of all the earth will do nothing but what is right." But it is a fact, that he thus permitted Job to be tried, in order that he might approve himself a perfect man: and in like manner he tried Abraham, in order that it might appear, whether his regard for God's authority, and his confidence in God's word, were sufficient to induce him to sacrifice his Isaac, the child of promise[e]. It was for similar ends that God permitted his people to be tried for forty years in the wilderness[f]; and in the same way he has tried his Church in every period of the world. This is the true reason of so many stumbling-blocks being laid in the way of those

[a] 2 Thess. ii. 9, 10. [b] Matt. xxiv. 24. [c] Matt. vii. 22.
[d] Jam. i. 13. [e] Gen. xxii. 1, 2, 12. [f] Deut. viii. 2.

who embrace the Christian faith. Christianity is not revealed in a way to meet with the approbation of proud and carnal men: it is foolishness to the natural man: yea, even Christ himself is a stumbling-block to some, as well as a sanctuary to others; and such a stumbling-block, as to be "a gin and a snare to both the houses of Israel," amongst whom it was foretold, "many should stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken[g]." It is God's express design in the whole constitution of our religion, to discover the secret bent of men's minds; and whilst to the humble he has given abundant evidence for their conviction, he has left to the proud sufficient difficulties to call forth their latent animosity, and to justify in their own apprehensions, their obstinate unbelief[h]. He gave originally to the Jews, as he has also given to us, sufficient evidence to satisfy any candid mind: and this is all that we have any right to expect. It was not necessary that our Lord should give to every man in the Jewish nation the same evidence of his resurrection, as he gave to Thomas: it was reasonable that there should be scope left for every man to exercise his own judgment on the evidences that were placed within his reach; as our Lord said to Thomas, "Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed; but blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed."

Hence then God enjoined his people not to regard any person who should attempt to draw them to idolatry, even though he should work a miracle before their eyes, or foretell an event that should afterwards come to pass. They had had abundant evidence, that the religion they had embraced was from God: they possessed also in the very nature of that religion an internal evidence of its excellency: and they had received from God such demonstrations of his power and goodness, as ought to unite them to him in the most indissoluble bonds of faith and love. If therefore they should be induced to renounce their allegiance to him, and to transfer it to dumb idols

[g] Isai. viii. 14, 15. [h] Luke ii. 34, 35.

that had never done any thing for them, nor ever could do any thing, they would betray a manifest want of love to him, and must blame themselves only, if they should ultimately be "given up to a delusion to believe a lie, and be left to perish" in their iniquity[1]. He would have them therefore upon their guard in relation to this matter, and resolutely to resist every attempt to draw them from him, however specious that attempt might be.

The argument founded on this injunction comes now before us with all the force that can be given to it. A Jew will say, 'You Christians found your faith on prophecies and on miracles: and admitting that Jesus did work some miracles, and did foretell some events which afterwards came to pass, God permitted it only to try us, and to prove our fidelity to him. He has cautioned us beforehand not to be led astray from him by any such things as these: he has expressly forbidden us to regard any thing that such a prophet might either say or do: nay more, he commanded that we should take such a prophet before the civil magistrate, and have him put to death: and therefore, however specious your reasonings appear, we dare not listen to them or regard them.

II. Having thus given to the objection all the force that the most hostile Jew can wish, I now come in the second place to offer, what we hope will prove a satisfactory answer to it.

It cannot but have struck the attentive reader, that in this objection there are two things taken for granted; namely, that in calling Jews to Christianity we are calling them *from* Jehovah; and that our authority for calling them to Christianity is founded on such miracles as an impostor might work, and such prophecies as an impostor might expect to see verified.

But in answer to these two points we declare, first, that we do not call them *from* Jehovah, but *to* him;—next, that our authority is not founded on such miracles and prophecies as might have issued from an impostor, but such as it was impossible for an

[1] 2 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

impostor to produce;—and lastly, that, in calling them to Christ, we have the express command of God himself.

First, we do not call our Jewish brethren *from* Jehovah, but *to* him.

We worship the very same God whom the Jews worship: and we maintain his unity as strongly as any Jew in the universe can maintain it. As for idols of every kind, we abhor them as much as Moses himself abhorred them. Moreover, we consider the law which was written on the two tables of stone as binding upon us, precisely as much as if it were again promulged by an audible voice from heaven. Instead of calling them *from* the law, we call them *to* it: we declare that every man who has transgressed it in any one particular, is deservedly condemned to everlasting misery[k]: and it is from a consciousness that this sentence must fall on every human being who has not fled for refuge to the hope set before him in the Gospel, that we are so anxious to call both Jews and Gentiles to a belief of the Gospel. We go further, and say, that no human being can be saved, who has not a perfect obedience to that law as his justifying righteousness. But where shall we find a perfect obedience to that law? where shall we find a man who can say, he has fulfilled it in every jot and tittle? Alas! we all have transgressed it times without number: we are all therefore condemned by it: and being condemned for our disobedience, we can never be justified by our obedience to it. Would to God, that this matter were understood by the Jews! we should find no difficulty then in leading them to Christ. Did they but know what wrath they have merited, they would be glad to hear of one who has borne it for them: and did they but know how impossible it is for an imperfect obedience to that law to justify them, they would be glad to hear of one who has fulfilled it in all its extent, and brought in an everlasting righteousness for all who believe in him. Yes, my Jewish brethren, know assuredly that the Christian "does not

[k] Deut. xxvii. 26. Gal. iii. 10.

make void the law, but establishes the law[l]:" and has no hope of salvation in any way, but such as "magnifies the law and makes it honourable[m];" and it is his earnest desire that you should agree with him in this matter; because he is sure, that, when once you come to understand your own law, and see how "Christ was the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," your difficulties will all vanish as the morning dew before the rising sun.

With respect to the ceremonial law, we do indeed call you from the observance of that; and we have good reason so to do; for you yourselves know, that all the essential part of your religion existed before the ceremonial law was given; and that Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, who lived hundreds of years before the ceremonial law was given, were saved simply and entirely by faith in that promised "Seed, in whom all the nations of the earth are blessed." By faith then in this promised Seed must you be saved: every child of Abraham must seek for acceptance in the way that Abraham did. If you ask, Why then was the ceremonial law given? I answer, To shadow forth your Messiah, and to lead you to him: and when he should come and fulfil it in all its parts, it was then to cease; and you yourselves know that it was intended by God himself to cease at that appointed time. Do you not know that your Messiah was to come out of the loins of David; and that he was also to be a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedec? But if there was to be a new priesthood after the order of Melchizedec, the priesthood of Aaron must cease: and if the new priest was to spring from David, who was of the tribe of Judah, and not from Levi to whose descendants the priesthood was confined, then it is clear from this also that the Aaronic priesthood must cease: and if that be changed, then must there of necessity be a change of the law also[n]: so that you yourselves know that the ceremonial law was never intended to continue any longer than the time fixed

[l] Rom. iii. 31. [m] Isai. xlii. 21. [n] Heb. vii. 11, 12.

for its completion in the predicted Messiah. If then we call you from the outward observances of that law, it is not from disrespect to that law, but from a conviction that it has been fulfilled and abrogated by the Lord Jesus. We call you only from shadows to the substance. We call you to Christ as uniting in himself all that the ceremonial law was intended to shadow forth. He is the true tabernacle, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is the true "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," even that "Lamb of God which, as John the Baptist testified, taketh away the sins of the world." He is the great High-Priest, who, having "through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God," is now "entered into the holy place with his own blood," and there "ever liveth to make intercession for us;" and is to come forth from thence once more to bless in his Father's name his waiting people. I wish then, my Jewish brethren, that you would particularly bear this in mind. We honour the ceremonial law as admirably calculated to prepare your minds for the Gospel; not only because it exhibited so fully and so minutely every part of the mediatorial office which our Lord was to sustain, but because by the burthensomeness of its rites it tended to break your spirit, and to make you sigh for deliverance. And methinks, it should be no grievance to you to be called from those observances, because you neither do, nor can, continue them: the destruction of your city and temple, and your whole ecclesiastical and civil polity, have rendered it impossible for you to comply with them, and have thus shut you up to the faith of Abraham, which is the faith of the Gospel.

I am aware that in calling you to worship the Lord Jesus Christ we appear to you to be transferring to him the honour due to God alone. But if you will look into your own Scriptures, you will find that the person who was foretold as your Messiah is no other than God himself. Examine the Psalm before referred to[o], and see how David speaks of your

[o] Ps. cx.

Messiah: "The LORD said unto my LORD, Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool." David here calls him Jehovah: and how could he do that, if that title did not properly belong to him? This question Jesus put to the Pharisees in his day; and they could not answer him a word: nor can all the Rabbis upon the face of the earth suggest any satisfactory answer to it now. The only answer that can be given is, that the same person, who as man, was David's son, as Jehovah, was David's Lord, or, as Isaiah calls him, "Emmanuel, God with us." Receive him in the character in which the Prophet Isaiah foretold his advent, as "the Child born, the Son given, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace." Call him, as another prophet instructs you, "JEHOVAH OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS:" and know, that, in thus "honouring Christ, you will honour the Father who sent him."

This then is my first answer; that in no respect whatever do we call you from God, but wholly and altogether to him; to Him, as the One true God, in opposition to all idols; to his law, as fulfilled in Christ, and directing you to him; and to his Gospel, as the completion and consummation of all the wonders of his love. In as far as we call you from your present course, it is only from types and shadows to the substance and reality. You remember that at the moment of our Lord's death the veil of the temple was rent in twain, and the most holy place was laid open to the view of all who were worshipping before it. The way into the holiest being thus opened to you all by God himself, we invite all to enter in with boldness, and assure you in God's name that you shall find acceptance with him.

The next thing which we proposed to shew was, that our authority for calling you thus to Christ is not founded on such prophecies or miracles as might have issued from an impostor, but on such as it was impossible for an impostor to produce.

Consider the prophecies: they were not some few dark predictions of mysterious import and of

doubtful issue, uttered by our Lord himself; but a continued series of prophecies from the very fall of Adam to the time of Christ; of prophecies comprehending an almost infinite variety of subjects, and those so minute, as to defy all concert either in those who uttered, or those who fulfilled, them. A great multitude of them were of such a kind that they could not possibly be fulfilled by any but the most inveterate enemies. Who but an enemy would have nailed him to the cross, or pierced him to the heart with a spear, or offered him gall and vinegar to drink, or mocked and insulted him in the midst of all his agonies? Do not these put his Messiahship beyond a doubt? I will mention only one prophecy of Christ himself; but it is such an one as no impostor would utter, and no impostor could fulfil. What impostor would rest all the credit of his mission on his being put to a cruel, ignominious, and accursed death, and rising from the dead the third day? Or if an impostor were foolish enough to utter such a prophecy, how, when he was actually dead, could he fulfil it? But the whole Scriptures predicted these things of Jesus, as Jesus also did of himself: and the exact fulfilment of them proves beyond all reasonable doubt his true Messiahship.

Consider the miracles also: these were beyond all comparison greater and more numerous than Moses ever wrought. The healing all manner of diseases was the daily and hourly employment of the Lord Jesus for the three or four last years of his life. The whole creation, men, devils, fishes, elements, all obeyed his voice; and at his command the dead arose to life again. But there is one miracle also which in particular we will mention. Jesus said, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again:" and the former of these he proved by speaking with a loud voice the very instant he gave up the ghost, shewing thereby, that he did not die in consequence of his nature being exhausted, but by a voluntary surrender of his life into his Father's hands. And at the appointed time he proved the

latter also, notwithstanding all the preparations made to defeat his purpose, all of which proved in the issue the strongest testimonies to the truth of his word. But would an impostor have pretended to such a power; or when actually dead, could he have exercised it? And, when the interval between his death and resurrection was to be so short, would not the stone, the seal, the watch, have been sufficient to secure the detection of the imposture? Further, would an impostor have undertaken to send down the Holy Ghost after his death for the purpose of enabling his followers to speak all manner of languages, and of working all kinds of miracles; or if he had predicted such things, could he have fulfilled them? Judge then whether here be not ground enough for that faith which we call you to exercise towards him? If there be not, how do you prove the divine authority of your own lawgiver? In point of testimony, great as was that which proved the divine mission of Moses, it was nothing when compared with that which substantiated the Messiahship of Jesus. We therefore confidently call you to believe in him, and to embrace the salvation which he offers you in the Gospel.

But there is one great argument which we have reserved till now, in order that it may bear upon you with the greater weight. We declare to you then, in the last place, that, in calling you to Christ, we have the express command of God himself.

Moses, in chapter xiii. of Deuteronomy, bids you, as we have seen, not to listen to any false prophet: but in chapter xviii. 18, 19, he most explicitly declares, that a Prophet should arise, to whom you should attend. Hear his own words: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

Now I ask you, Who is the Prophet here spoken

of? Where was there ever, besides Moses, a prophet that was a Mediator, a Lawgiver, a Ruler, a Deliverer? Was there ever such an one, except Jesus? And was not Jesus such an one in all respects? Yes; he has wrought for you not a mere temporal deliverance like Moses, but a spiritual and eternal deliverance from sin and Satan, death and hell: He has redeemed you, not by power only, but by price also, even the inestimable price of his own blood. Having thus bought you with his blood, he ever liveth in heaven itself to make continual intercession for you. A new law also has he given you, "the law of faith," in conformity to which he enjoins you to walk, and by which he will judge you in the last day. Of this blessed person all your own prophets have spoken; and this very Moses, in whom you trust, declares to you, that, "if you will not hear and obey this Prophet, God will require it of you." When therefore you plead the authority of Moses, we join issue with you, and say, *Be consistent.* Renounce false prophets, because he bids you: but believe in the true Prophet, whom God according to his word has raised up to you, because he bids you. Let his authority weigh equally with you in both cases: and then we shall not fear, but that you will embrace the salvation offered you in the Gospel, and be the spiritual children, as ye already are the natural descendants, of believing Abraham. "Abraham looked forward with eager expectation to see the day of Christ, and saw it, and was glad." May ye also now see it, and rejoice in him as your Saviour for evermore!

It is for your partiality in this respect that God has punished you now these eighteen hundred years, and is punishing you at this day. He told you, "he would require of you" your rejection of this Prophet; and he has required it more severely, than he has all your other sins ever since you became a nation. O repent of this evil, and turn to God in his appointed way! so shall his wrath be turned away from you, and "you shall be saved *in the Lord* with an everlasting salvation."

We cannot CONCLUDE our subject without suggesting a suitable improvement of it to our Christian brethren—

As the Jews were constantly assailed by idolaters who sought to draw them from the worship of the true God, so are you by infidels, or worldlings, to draw you from the belief or practice of the Gospel. But do infidels assault you? Ask them whether their objections, all of which arise from ignorance alone, are sufficient to invalidate all the evidences which may be adduced in support of our religion? If not, then "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering." Do worldlings tell you that God does not require you to renounce the world, and to give yourselves up entirely to him? Ask them, what proof they can give, that God has authorized them to set aside the plainest declarations of his word. You may expect at least that they shall be possessed of miraculous and prophetic powers, or else they have not so much as the semblance of true prophets. But even if they had these powers and displayed them evidently before your eyes, yet ought you not to regard their counsels, because they seek to turn you from God to a poor perishing and worthless idol; from God, who has redeemed you by the blood of his only dear Son, and given you all things in and with him, to an idol, that never has done any thing for you, nor ever can. Be firm therefore, even though your father or your mother, your brother or your sister, or even the wife of your own bosom, should seek to turn you from the Lord. Your plain answer to them all is, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye." Whatever temptations they offer, or menaces they employ, let nothing induce you to draw back from following the Lord fully. "Be faithful unto death; and he will give you a crown of life."

## CCVII.

### GUILT AND DANGER OF DEPARTING FROM GOD.

Deut. xiii. 6—11. *If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.*

THERE is a striking difference between the laws of man and the laws of God: those which are framed by human legislators, proportion always the sanctions to the influence which crimes have upon the public welfare: whereas those enacted by our heavenly Lawgiver, mark with greater severity the evils which more immediately affect his own honour and glory. If one man robbed or maimed another, his law required only a four-fold restitution, or the infliction of a punishment precisely similar to the injury sustained: but if a man, even the dearest relative they had, should only propose to any of his people to worship another god in preference to Jehovah, he must instantly be brought before the magistrates, and, on conviction of the offence, be stoned to death.

It will be proper to consider this ordinance in a two-fold view;

I. As a temporary enactment—

This enactment, or law, appears at first sight to be severe: but we undertake to shew that it was,

1. Just, as it respected the individual—

[The greatest crimes against any human government are

*treason*, and *murder;* and, by the general consent of mankind, the principals who are found guilty of those crimes are put to death. Now, in the tempting of men to idolatry, both these crimes were contained: there was *treason* against the King of kings; and there was *murder*, not indeed of the bodies, but of the souls, of men. The person who made the proposal, did by that very act endeavour to draw men from their allegiance to God, and to engage them on the side of God's enemy and rival. And, as far as his endeavours were attended with success, he eternally destroyed all who complied with his solicitations. Now compare the crimes, and see whether those committed against God and the souls of men be not infinitely more heinous than those which reach no further than to human governments, and the bodily life: and, if they be, the justice of the punishment annexed to them will admit of no doubt: it will be just, that He whose throne we would subvert, should inflict upon us the penalty of death; and that they whom we would ruin for ever, should be made the executioners of that sentence.]

2. Merciful, as it respected the public—

[The Jews had been nurtured in the midst of an idolatrous nation; and, after their settlement in Canaan, they were surrounded with idolaters on every side. Moreover they were of themselves exceedingly addicted to idolatry. But the consequence of their departure from God would be, that they would bring his heaviest judgments upon them, and be reduced to a more calamitous condition than any people under heaven. But God was graciously pleased to put a barrier in their way, which, it might be hoped, they should never be able to pass. He not only annexed the penalty of death to *an act* of idolatry, but even to *a proposal* to commit that sin: yea, to prevent such a proposal from being ever made, he not only authorized, but commanded, the person to whom it was made, to give immediate information of it to the magistrates, and to be the first in inflicting the punishment of death. If the person making the proposal should be ever so dear to him, though it should be his own brother, or son or daughter, or even the wife of his bosom, or his friend that is as his own soul, he must make no difference; he must shew no respect of persons whatever: "Thou shalt not *consent* unto him, says God, nor *hearken* unto him; neither shall thine eye *pity* him, neither shalt thou *spare*, neither shalt thou *conceal* him; but *thou* shalt surely *kill* him:" all natural affection must be laid aside, and be swallowed up in a concern for God's honour; and the man himself must become the informer, the witness, and the executioner, even where the delinquent is dearer to him than his own soul. What child, what wife, what friend, if he had conceived an idolatrous inclination in his heart, would dare to mention it, when the person to whom he

should mention it was precluded from all exercise of mercy, and was constrained to proceed against him according to this law? Thus then provision was made to prevent the possibility, as it should seem, of the nation ever yielding to idolatry, or provoking God to abandon them according to the threatenings which he had denounced against them. We are informed in the text that the very *execution* of this law was designed to produce this salutary effect[a]; and therefore much more must the *enactment* of it be an expression of love and mercy to the whole nation.]

This law indeed was only temporary: it was to continue in force only during the continuance of the Jewish polity: but it is nevertheless most instructive to us,

II. As a lasting admonition—

To the very end of time it will speak loudly to us; it declares to us, in the strongest terms,

1. The evil of departing from God—

[The annexing of the penalty of death, and of so cruel a death as that of stoning, is of itself no slight intimation of the evil of idolatry: but the requiring a man to execute this sentence against the wife of his bosom, or the friend that is as his own soul; the requiring him to do it even on account of a mere proposal, though the proposal was never carried into effect; the not suffering him to overlook or conceal the matter, but constraining him instantly to enforce the law without pity; how was it possible for God himself to mark the evil of this sin in blacker colours, or to shew his abhorrence of it in a stronger manner, than by such an enactment as this? The command to destroy a whole city for idolatry was scarcely a more awful demonstration of his anger than this[b].

But it may be said, "This was idolatry, a sin to which we have no temptation." It was idolatry: but permit me to ask, wherein the great evil of idolatry consists? Is it not in alienating our affections from God, and placing them on some creature? Is it not justly described by the Apostle as "loving and serving the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for evermore?" Is it not in this very view of the subject that covetousness is called idolatry, and that men are said to make "a god of their belly?" Is it not in this view that St. John says to all the Christian Church, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols?" What then does it signify, that we are not bowing down to stocks and stones, if there be idols enthroned in our hearts? God is equally provoked to jealousy,

[a] ver. 11. [b] ver. 12—18.

whether our idolatry be open and carnal, or secret and spiritual: and though he does not authorize *man* to proceed against us, he will take the matter into his own hand, and inflict upon us the punishment we deserve. It is in reference to this that St. Paul utters that severe denunciation against all who decline from their love to Christ; "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be *anathema maran-atha;*" that is, His departure from Christ deserves the heaviest judgments; and though we are not now at liberty to inflict them, *God surely and quickly will.*

O that all who have waxed cold in their affections towards God, would lay this to heart! If God be not seated on the throne of our hearts and sweetly ruling and reigning there, the creature is: and whether the idol be pleasure, or riches, or honour, or any thing else, however excellent or however base, we are idolaters; and shall be made to feel, that "it is an evil and bitter thing to forsake the Lord;" yea, that "it were better never to have known him, than, after knowing him, to depart from him."]

2. The danger of being accessary to any one's departure from him—

[There are a variety of ways in which we may be instrumental in turning others from God. What if we scoff at religion, and deride the practice of it as folly or enthusiasm; do we not, in fact, say to those around us, "Come, let us serve other gods?" What if we exert our influence and authority to deter people from attending where the word is preached with fidelity and power, or from associating with the despised followers of Jesus; are we not yet more decidedly guilty of hostility to God? for when we only scoff at religion, we leave people an alternative; but when we set ourselves to intimidate men from following after God, we are no longer *seducers*, but *persecutors*. But, supposing we do not take so decided a part against God, yet, if all our fears are against excess in religion, and none against a defect in it, if all the advice we give is to shun the cross and avoid the shame of a religious profession, and none at all to "endure the cross and despise the shame," whom is it that we serve? Can we with propriety be called the friends and servants of our God? No: Find us in all the sacred records one single servant of his that ever shewed such dispositions as these. I forget: we can find one: we remember Peter's kind solicitude for his Master, and his affectionate expression of it too; "Master, spare thyself:" but we remember also the answer of Jesus to him; "Get thee behind me, *Satan;* thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men." Let me then warn friends and relatives of every description how they use their

influence; lest, whilst they think that they are shewing kindness to man, they be found in reality fighting against God. Let me remind them, that, whether they succeed or not, their guilt is the same; they have made the proposal, and for that proposal they shall die: and would to God that the being stoned to death were the worst punishment they shall endure! but, alas! it were infinitely "better that a millstone were put about their neck, and that they were cast into the midst of the sea, than that they should offend one of God's little ones:" it were better, I say; because they would lose only the bodily life: but in turning any one from God, they forfeit their own souls, and expose themselves to everlasting misery in hell. If friends would see what use they should make of their influence, the prophet will tell them; they should endeavour to draw one another nearer unto God; and should themselves endeavour to lead the way[c].]

3. The need we have of firmness and steadfastness in religion—

[No one can tell what temptations he may have to encounter, or from what quarter they shall spring, or how specious and powerful they may be. Perhaps the children whom we have fondled with delight, or the wife of our bosom, or the friend that is as our own soul, may be our tempters to decline from God, or the occasions of our yielding to temptation. Perhaps the suggestion may be so specious, that it shall appear to have come from a prophet of the Lord, and to have been confirmed by a sign from heaven[d]. But our principles of religion should be so fixed, as to be incapable of being moved even by an angel from heaven[e]; and our practice of it should be so determined, that no considerations whatsoever should be able to make us swerve for one moment from the path of duty. The fate of the man of God who listened to the lying prophet, should teach us this[f]. Our rule is clear, and we should follow it without turning either to the right hand or the left[g].

But it will be asked, How shall I obtain this steadfastness? I answer, Compare the God whom you serve, with all the gods that are his rivals and competitors. This is the consideration by which God himself enforces that which might otherwise have appeared a sanguinary edict: he grounds the severity of his displeasure on the greatness of the mercies he had bestowed upon them[h]. But what were those mercies in comparison of the blessings he has conferred on you? Think *from what a bondage* you are redeemed; think *by what means* that redemption has been accomplished for you; think *what an inheritance*

[c] Zech. viii. 21. [d] ver. 1—5. 2 Cor. xi. 13—15. [e] Gal. i. 8, 9.
[f] 1 Kings xiii. 18—24. [g] ver. 4. [h] ver. 10.

is purchased for you; and then say whether any thing in this world can have such a claim to your regards as the Lord Jesus Christ has. Only get your hearts impressed with a sense of his love, and the vanities of time and sense will be to you no more than the dirt under your feet. Only commit yourselves to Christ, "and be strong in the grace that is in him," and you will find, that "neither angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus:" for "he is able to keep you from falling," and "will preserve you blameless unto his heavenly kingdom." Whatever then your temptations be, or from whatever quarter they may spring, I say to every one of you, "Hold fast that thou hast, and let no man take thy crown[1]."]

[1] Rev. iii. 11.

## CCVIII.

### THE DUTY OF CHARITY ENFORCED.

Deut. xv. 7—11. *If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren, within any of thy gates in thy land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand: and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the Lord against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.*

THE existence of various ranks and orders among men is the necessary consequence of civilization. A perfect equality among them is impossible in the nature of things: nor, if it were made to exist, could it continue for any time. An inequality of condition is even far more conducive to the general good, not only in that it tends to keep up a due subordination of the lower to the higher classes, but that it binds all the classes of men together by the ties of mutual

usefulness and dependence. Even in the state that was formed by God himself, it was ordained that such a diversity of ranks should subsist[a]. Still, however, it never was the divine intention that some should be left destitute of all the comforts of life, while others rioted in opulence and prodigality. To prevent this he commanded his people to forgive the poor their debts at the year of release[b], and required all who should enjoy a comparative state of affluence, to relieve the poor and indigent.

In discoursing on the words before us, we shall consider,

I. The duty enjoined—

God commanded his people to exercise liberality to the poor—

[He had appointed every seventh year to be a year of release[c]. By this means the poor could not be oppressed for any length of time. But this very law might also tend to the disadvantage of the poor. To prevent any such evil consequence, God ordered that his people should be equally favourable to the poor notwithstanding the year of release. He enjoined the rich to lend to the poor, even under a moral certainty of losing their debt. Yea, they were to perform this duty in a bountiful and willing manner.]

His injunctions to them are, as far as it respects the spirit of them, equally binding upon us—

[God requires us to "do good and *lend, hoping for nothing again*[d]." And certainly this is our duty. The relation which the poor bear to us necessarily involves in it this obligation[e]. The Scriptures at large, as well as the immediate expressions in the text, inculcate this duty in the strongest terms[f].

[a] "*The poor shall never cease out of the land*," ver. 11.

[b] He assigns as his reason for this ordinance, "*to the end that there may be no poor among you*," ver. 3, 4. See the translation in *the margin* of the Bible.

[c] ver. 1, 2. [d] Luke vi. 35.

[e] They are *four times* in the text called "our brethren." The force of this idea is admirably expressed, Job xxxi. 15—19. and it is further confirmed by the words of our Lord, Matt. xxv. 40.

[f] "*Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand — Thou shalt surely lend—surely give—I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide*," &c. See this enjoined on all generally, Luke

*The manner* also of performing this duty is as strongly enjoined as the duty itself. We must act *bountifully* towards the poor, proportioning our alms to our own ability, and, as far as possible, to their necessities[g]. We must also administer relief *cheerfully*. Grudging and niggardly thoughts are apt to arise in our minds: but they proceed from a "wicked heart;" and must be guarded against with all possible circumspection[h]. Our alms are *then only* acceptable to God, when they are offered with a willing mind[i].]

To call forth a just sense of our duty, let us consider,

II. The arguments with which it is enforced—

Waving all other arguments that might be adduced, we shall confine our attention to those specified in the text. There are two considerations urged as inducements to the performance of this duty:

1. The danger of neglecting it—

[Men are apt to think themselves sole proprietors of what they have; but, in fact, they are only God's stewards. The poor have, from God's command, *a claim* upon us; and when their distresses are not relieved, he will hear their complaints. He expressly warns us that, "*when they cry to him, it shall be sin to us.*" Our guilt contracted by want of liberality, shall surely be visited upon our own heads; it shall bring upon us the execration of our fellow-creatures[k], a dereliction from our God[l], yea, an everlasting dismission from his presence and glory[m]———Who that reflects a moment on these consequences, will not "*beware*" of indulging a disposition that must infallibly entail them upon him?]

2. The reward of practising it—

[Heaven cannot be purchased by almsgiving: and to think it could, would be a most fatal delusion. Nevertheless God has annexed a blessing to the performance of this duty; "*For this*

xi. 41.; on all individually, 1 Cor. xvi. 2.; and in the most solemn manner, 1 Tim. vi. 17. "*Charge,*" *&c.*

[g] "*Thou shalt open thine hand wide — lend him sufficient for his need.*" See true bountifulness defined, 2 Cor. viii. 12.; exemplified, 2 Cor. viii. 2.; encouraged, 2 Cor. ix. 6.

[h] "*Beware, &c.—and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother—thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest,*" *&c.* See similar directions, Rom. xii. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 18. "*Ready* to distribute; *willing* to communicate."

[i] 2 Cor. ix. 7.

[k] Prov. xxviii. 27.

[l] Prov. xxi. 13.

[m] Matt. xxv. 41—43. "*For.*"

*thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.*" Supposing our motives and principles be such as the Gospel requires, and our alms be really the fruits of faith and love, the Scriptures assure us that they shall be followed with blessings temporal[n]—spiritual[o]—eternal[p]. Yea, God, speaking after the manner of men, condescends to say, that we make him our debtor; and to promise, that He will repay us the full amount of whatever we give to others for his sake[q]. What greater encouragement can we have than such assurances as these?]

APPLICATION—

[The occasion on which we now solicit your alms, is urgent; the objects of distress are many—the season inclement—work scarce—wants numerous—provisions high—and few to administer relief.

Consider then the urgency of the call—the danger of non-compliance—the blessings promised—and especially, the great account. *Guard against a grudging spirit:* and act towards the poor at this time, as you, in a change of circumstances, would think it right for them to act towards you.]

[n] Luke vi. 35, last part. and Prov. iii. 9, 10.
[o] Isai. lviii. 7, 10, 11.
[p] Luke xvi. 9. and xiv. 14. and 1 Tim. vi. 19. and Matt. xxv. 34, 35. "*For.*" [q] Prov. xix. 17. and 2 Cor. ix. 6.

## CCIX.

### THE RELEASE OF BOND-SERVANTS.

Deut. xv. 12—15. *If thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy wine-press: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bond-man in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to-day.*

BENEVOLENCE characterized the whole of the Jewish law; as well of that law which regulated the state, as of that which was to govern the souls of individuals. Some things indeed were tolerated under that dispensation which do not accord with the more sublime morality of the Gospel. Polygamy

and divorce were suffered, on account of the hardness of the people's hearts, and in order to prevent the still greater evils which would have resulted from the entire prohibition of them. Slavery also was permitted for the same reasons: but still there were restraints put upon men in relation to these things, and many regulations were framed, to counteract the abuses which were likely to flow from the licence afforded them. It was permitted to men to purchase slaves, and *that* even from among their brethren. But an express command was given, that no man should "rule over them with rigour;" that every slave should be liberated after six years of service; and that ample provision should be made for him on his dismission, in order that he might be able in future to support himself. It is of this ordinance that we are now to speak: and in it we may see,

I. An encouraging emblem—

As the whole of the ceremonial law, so parts also of the judicial law, were of a typical nature. This appointment in particular emblematically represented two things;

1. The redemption which God vouchsafes to his people—

[Both Scripture and experience attest, that all mankind are in a state of bondage. They are "tied and bound with the chain of their sins:" they are "led captive by the devil at his will"——— But the time is come when we are permitted to assert our liberty. The Lord Jesus Christ has "proclaimed liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound:" and it must be by our own voluntary consent alone that we can be retained any longer in our former bondage. Whatever had been the occasion of the Hebrew servant's bondage, whether he had sold himself through poverty, or been sold by a relentless creditor to pay his debts, or been sentenced to such a punishment by the civil magistrate for his crimes, he was equally free the very moment that the six years of his servitude were expired. Thus it is with us: there is no room to ask in desponding strains, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or *the lawful captive* delivered[a]?" for the truth now sounds in our ears, and "the truth shall make us free[b]."

[a] Isai. xlix. 24, 25. [b] John viii. 32.

As surely as ever Moses was sent to the oppressed Israelites to deliver them, so surely are the tidings of salvation now sent to us: and though our tyrannical master may use his utmost efforts to keep us in subjection, he shall not prevail. The Lord Jesus Christ is come to deliver us; and "if the Son make us free, we shall be free indeed[c]."]

2. The mercy which he exercises towards his redeemed—

[There was a direction given to Moses, that the people at their departure from Egypt should "borrow of their neighbours jewels of silver and jewels of gold, and that they should spoil the Egyptians;" "When ye go," said God to them, "ye shall not go empty[d]." In like manner this injunction was given to the Hebrew master, at the time when he should be required to liberate his slave; "Thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy wine-press: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee, thou shalt give unto him." And is it not thus that God deals with his redeemed people? "Does he require any man to go a warfare at his own charges?" True it is, he does not set up his people with a stock of grace, that they may afterwards live independent of him; but "he will supply all their need" out of the fulness which he has treasured up for them in Christ Jesus; and "out of that fulness they shall all receive, even grace for grace[e]." Yes assuredly, this picture shall be realized in all who assert their liberty: for "they that fear the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good."]

But besides this emblematical representation, there is in the text,

II. An instructive lesson—

The Hebrew masters were bidden to "remember, that they themselves were once bond-men in the land of Egypt," and that on that very account God had given them this command in relation to their bond-slaves. From hence it appears, that we are to regard God's mercies,

1. As a pattern for our imitation—

[When Israel were groaning under their burthens in Egypt, God said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people; I know their sorrows:" and on another occasion we

[c] John viii. 36. [d] Exod. iii. 21, 22.
[e] Col. i. 19. with John i. 16.

are told, "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel[f]." And when once they were liberated from their bondage, what incessant kindness did he shew them, administering to all their wants, and fulfilling all their desires! This was the conduct which the Hebrew masters were to imitate: and this tenderness, this compassion, this sympathy, this love, is to characterize his people to the end of time. Remarkable is that direction given us by the Apostle Paul; "Be ye followers (imitators[g]) of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ has loved us." Here the same principle is established: we are to imitate God in all his imitable perfections, and especially in that which is the crown and summit of them all, unbounded love. We are, as far as it is possible for finite creatures to do it, to tread in the very steps of Christ himself, and to follow him even in that stupendous effort of love, his dying on the cross; for St. John, having spoken of his "love in laying down his life for us," adds, "And *we* ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren[h]." What an object for our ambition is here! O that we might be satisfied with nothing short of this! that instead of admiring ourselves on account of more common exercises of love, we might rather see how defective we are even in our best duties; and might learn to overlook all past attainments as nothing, and to be pressing forward for higher degress of conformity to our God and Saviour[i]!]

2. As a motive for our exertion—

[The mercy vouchsafed to the Jewish nation was to operate on all of them as an incentive to obedience; and, as God has required acts of love to our brethren as the best evidence of our love to him, it is in that more especially that we must endeavour to requite the loving-kindness of our God. The man that grudges a few pence to a fellow-servant after having been forgiven by his Lord a debt of ten thousand talents, can expect nothing but indignation from the hands of God[k]. The true spirit of God's redeemed people was well exemplified in the Apostle Paul, when he declared, "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them, and rose again." If then we have any hope that we ourselves have been partakers of mercy, let us feel our obligations, and say with David, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" and, if we have in ourselves an evidence that God hath "bought us

[f] Judg. x. 16. [g] μιμηται, Eph. v. 1, 2.
[h] 1 John iii. 16. [i] Phil. iii. 13—15. [k] Matt. xviii. 32—34.

with a price," let us strive to the uttermost to "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits, which are his[1]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are yet in bondage to sin and Satan—

[Why should you continue in bondage another day? May not the past time suffice to have served such hard masters? and is not liberty at this moment proclaimed to you? "Behold, this is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation." Think not of the difficulties that are in your way, but of the power that will enable you to surmount them. He who rescued Israel from Egypt, yet liveth; and "will shew himself strong in behalf of all who call upon him." If you continue in your bondage, O think of the wages that you will receive! "the wages of sin is death:"—but if you assert your liberty, you shall be numbered among "the freemen of the Lord," and have HIM for your portion in time and in eternity.]

2. Those who profess to have been freed from their bondage—

[You have seen wherein you are to glorify your God. Remember, that it is in relative life especially you are to shew forth the power of divine grace. Let it be seen in your households, that you are enabled to walk worthy of your high calling. It is in your families that the truth and excellence of your principles is to be displayed. It is easy enough to be kind and liberal abroad; but look to it that these graces are exercised at home: let your wife, your children, your servants, reap the benefit of your conversion. Let liberality be in your hearts, and the law of kindness in your lips. Shew that religion is an operative principle; and that it is uniform in its operation: and know that a profession of religion without such an exhibition of its power, will be accounted no better than hypocrisy either by God or man. If you would be approved of God at last, you must "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."]

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

## CCX.

### THE SERVANT DEVOTING HIMSELF TO HIS MASTER'S SERVICE.

Deut. xv. 16, 17. *And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee, (because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee,) then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever.*

THE work of redemption was typified, not only by stated proclamations of liberty every fiftieth year, which was called the year of jubilee, but also by provision that all Hebrew servants, for whatever cause they had become bond-men, should be liberated from their bondage after the expiration of six years. But it would sometimes happen that a person might be so well pleased with his situation as not to wish to leave it, but to prefer it before that to which he was entitled. For such cases particular provision was made by God himself; and a very singular rite was appointed for the ratification of his purpose: on declaring before a magistrate that he chose to continue his master's bond-servant, his master was to bore his ear through with an awl to the door or door-post; and the servant could never afterwards claim his liberty till the year of jubilee.

We should not have ventured to annex any great importance to this ordinance, if the inspired writers themselves had not led the way. But we apprehend that they refer to it as a type; and in that view we conceive it deserves peculiar attention. We shall endeavour therefore to point out to you,

I. Its typical reference—

It is well known that our Saviour, as Mediator between God and man, was the Father's servant[a]: in this capacity he set himself wholly to do the Father's will[b]; and never for one moment admitted so much as a thought of relinquishing his service, till he could say, "I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do."

Let us briefly notice this at the different periods of his humiliation—

[*At his incarnation.*—When the fulness of time was come, and the season had arrived when he must assume our fallen nature in order to execute the work assigned him, though he must empty himself of all his glory, and leave his Father's bosom, and "make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant," and be "made in the likeness of sinful flesh," and bear all the infirmities (the sinless infirmities) of our

[a] Isai. xlii. 1. John xii. 49. [b] John iv. 34.

nature, he would not go back from the engagements which he had entered into with his Father, but condescended to be born of a virgin, and to become bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He loved the work he had undertaken; he delighted in the prospect of glorifying his Father, and saving our ruined race; and accounted no condescension too great for the accomplishing of this stupendous purpose.

*At the time of his sufferings and death*, he still persisted in his resolution to do and suffer all that was necessary for our redemption. He often forewarned his disciples of the precise sufferings which he was to endure: and when one of the most highly favoured among them endeavoured to dissuade him from his purpose, he reproved him with great severity[c], determining never to recede till he had completed the work which he had engaged to perform. When, under the pressure of inconceivable agonies, his human nature began, as it were, to fail, he still maintained his steadfastness; "Not my will, but thine be done." Had it pleased him, even when apprehended by his enemies, or hanging on the cross, to terminate his sufferings before the time, he might have had legions of angels sent for his deliverance[d]: but he would not suffer the cup to pass from him till he had drunk it to the lowest dregs.]

All this, it may be said, is very true; but what relation has it to the point before us? We answer, that this steadfastness of his in performing engagements, which without any necessity on his part he had undertaken, was the very thing typified in the ordinance we are now considering—

[The Psalmist expressly speaking of Christ's appointment to make that atonement for sin which the Mosaic sacrifices only prefigured, says, (in allusion to the ordinance before us,) that God the Father had "opened, or bored, the ears" of his servant[e]. And St. Paul, citing that very passage, quotes it, not in the same precise words, but according to their true meaning: "Sacrifice and burnt-offering thou wouldest not; but *a body hast thou prepaved me*[f]." Moreover both the inspired writers go on to mark in the strongest terms the determination of heart with which the Messiah *should* fulfil, and actually *did* fulfil, the inconceivably arduous task which he had undertaken[g].]

[c] Matt. xvi. 21—23.
[d] Matt. xxvi. 53,54.
[e] Ps. xl. 6—8.
[f] Heb. x. 5—7.

[g] Note the varied expressions; "Lo, I come: I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." These, applied as they are to *the whole* of the Messiah's humiliation, (Heb. x. 8—10.) mark strongly his determination as grounded upon love.

The circumstance of the Septuagint translation of the 40th Psalm

Trusting that we have not been guided by fancy in our interpretation of this type, let us inquire into,

II. The practical instruction to be deduced from it—

As a *civil* ordinance, it seems to have been well calculated to instil into the minds both of masters and servants a strict attention to each other's happiness and welfare, so that neither of them might ever wish for a dissolution of their mutual bonds. (And O! that our present consideration of it might be so improved by all who sustain either of those relations!) But, as a *typical* ordinance, it must, in its practical improvement, have a wider range.

Our blessed Lord has not only redeemed us to God by his blood, but has also "set us an example, that we should follow his steps." Hence it is evident that we should,

1. Love the service of our God—

[We should not account any of "his commandments grievous," or say concerning any precept of his, "This is an hard saying." He himself has told us that "his yoke is easy, and his burthen is light:" and in our Liturgy we acknowledge "his service to be perfect freedom." Such was the language of David: "O how I love thy law!" and again, "I esteem thy commandments concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way." Let it "not then be of constraint that you serve him, but willingly and of a ready mind." And if you foresee difficulties and trials in your way, be not ashamed; but give up yourself unreservedly to God, and adopt the language of the Messiah himself, "Lo, I come; I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart"— — —]

2. Adhere to it steadfastly to the latest hour of your life—

[Many reasons might have operated on the mind of a

containing the same words as the Apostle quotes, proves nothing either *for* or *against* the point in hand. We apprehend that some early transcriber of the Septuagint, from a deference to St. Paul's authority, altered that translation to make it agree with his words: for we have no reason to think that the Seventy would have presumed to paraphrase that part of the Psalm, instead of translating it; and we are certain that they could not have paraphrased it in that manner (unless by express revelation for that purpose), because they neither had, nor could have, sufficiently clear views of the Gospel, to mark its deepest mystery in so precise a way.

servant to prevent him from perpetuating his bondage. He might fear an alteration in the behaviour of his master, and comfort himself with the idea of liberty. In like manner we may paint to ourselves many trials that may be avoided, and many gratifications that may be enjoyed, by declining the service of our God. But let no considerations operate upon your minds: you shall lose no gratification that shall not be far overbalanced by the comfort of a good conscience; nor suffer any trial, which shall not be recompensed with a proportionable weight of glory in a better world. You are not likely to lose more than Paul; yet he says, "What was gain to me, that I counted loss for Christ; yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of him." You are not likely to *suffer* more than he: yet he says, "But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself." Thus let it be with you: "Be not weary in well-doing;" but "cleave unto the Lord with full purpose of heart:" "Be steadfast, immovable, and always abounding in his work:" "Be faithful unto death, and he shall give you a crown of life"— — —]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have already declined from the Lord's ways—

[I ask not what sufferings you have avoided, or what pleasures you have gained. This only will I ask; Are you as happy as you were? I am content to put the whole to this issue; and to abide by the decision of your own conscience. I know that though a conscience may be seared, a soul cannot be happy that departs from God. O think what a Master you have slighted; and say, "I will return unto my first husband, for then it was better with me than now."]

2. Those who are doubting whether to devote themselves to God or not—

[Many there are who, seeing the necessity of serving God, are contriving how they may do it with the least risk or trouble to themselves. They are thinking to "serve both God and Mammon." But this is impossible, because the two services are opposite and inconsistent. Let us not however be misunderstood. We *may*, and *must*, fulfil our duties in the world, yea, and fulfil them diligently too: but God alone must be our Lord and Governor. He will not accept such a measure of our affection and service as the world will deign to allow him; but says, "My son, give me thy heart," thy whole heart. Every interest of ours, and every wish, must be subordinated to his will. Determine this then with yourselves, that you will be his, *wholly* and *for ever*. Let your ears be bored to his doorpost: and let, not your actions merely, but your very thoughts,

be henceforth kept in a willing captivity to him. "If Baal be God, serve him: but if the Lord be God, then serve him."]

3. Those who profess themselves his willing and devoted servants—

[Shew to the world that his service is a reasonable and a delightful service. Let not the difference between you and others be found merely in some foolish peculiarities, but in a holy, heavenly conversation. And be not mournful and dejected, as if God were an hard master; but "serve him with gladness and joyfulness of heart," that all around you may see the comforts of religion, and know, from what they behold in you, that the Church militant and Church triumphant are *one*; one in occupation, and one in joy.]

## CCXI.

### REDEMPTION TO BE EVER BORNE IN MIND.

Deut. xvi. 3. *Remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt, all the days of thy life.*

OF all the facts recorded in the Old Testament, the Resurrection of our blessed Lord created the most general and intense interest; because, by that, the hopes of his enemies were blasted, and the fears of his followers were dispelled. We may judge of the emotions that were excited by it from this circumstance, that, when two of the disciples, in their way to Emmaus, had seen their Lord, and had returned to Jerusalem to inform their brethren, they, on entering the room where they were assembled together, found them all saying one to another with most joyous exultation, "The Lord is risen indeed! the Lord is risen indeed[a]!" Between that and the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, there is a strict analogy. In fact, the deliverance from Egypt was typical of our redemption by Christ: and, as God required that the people of Israel should remember the one to their latest hour, so does he expect that we should remember the other "all the days of our life."

The words which I have read to you are assigned by Moses as the end for which the paschal feast, and the feast of unleavened bread, were instituted;

[a] Luke xxiv. 1—3, 30—34.

namely, to keep up in the minds of that people, to their latest posterity, the remembrance of the typical deliverance: and with the same object in view, I would now call your attention to the Resurrection of our blessed Lord. Beloved Brethren, it is a subject of supreme importance: and to every one of you I would say,

I. Treasure it up in your minds—

Good reason was there why the Jews should remember their deliverance from Egypt—

[Most grievous was their bondage there[b]: and most wonderful were God's interpositions for them[c]———Never, from the beginning of the world, had God exerted himself in behalf of any people as he did for them[d]. There was good reason, therefore, why so singular a mercy should be had in everlasting remembrance.]

But far greater reason is there why we should bear in mind the resurrection of our blessed Lord—

[Far more grievous was our bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell———And infinitely more wonderful were the means used for our deliverance[e]———Yea, and infinitely more blessed the issue of it[f]———Shall we, then, ever forget *this?* Would not the "very stones cry out against us?"———]

Yet, dwell not on it as a mere fact; but,

II. Improve it in your lives—

The Jews, in remembrance of their redemption, were to kill the passover, and to keep the feast of unleavened bread[g]——— And, if we would answer God's end in our deliverance, we must improve it,

1. By a renewed application to that sacrifice by which the deliverance was obtained—

[It was by sprinkling the blood of the paschal lamb on the door-posts and lintels of their houses that the Jews obtained deliverance from the sword of the destroying angel[h]——— And to the blood of Christ, who is "the true paschal sacrifice,"

[b] Exod. iii. 7.
[c] The ten plagues, and the passage of the Red Sea, &c.
[d] Deut. iv. 32—34.
[e] The incarnation and death of God's only-begotten Son.
[f] Not mere temporal benefits in Canaan, but everlasting happiness in heaven. [g] ver. 1—3. [h] Deut. xii. 21—24.

must we apply, "sprinkling it on our hearts and consciences[i]," and expecting from it the most perfect deliverance[k] — — — To those who use these means, there is no danger[l] — — — to those who neglect to use them, there is no escape[m] — — —]

2. By more diligent endeavours after universal holiness—

[What the meaning of the unleavened feast was, we are told by the Apostle Paul, who urges us to carry into effect what that typified: "Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth[n]." In vain we keep the passover, if we do not also keep the feast of unleavened bread: they are absolutely inseparable. The very end for which Christ redeemed us, was, "that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works[o]:" and, if we would reap the full benefit of his resurrection, "we must seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God[p]." — — — This was *designed* by God in the appointment of the feast we have been speaking of[q]; and the same is designed in the mercy vouchsafed to us[r] — — —]

In CONCLUSION, then, I say,

[Be thankful to God for the special call which is now given you to observe this day. If to the Jews it was said, "This is a night to be much observed to the Lord, for bringing them out of the land of Egypt; this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations[s];" how much more may it be said to us! Methinks, any man who kept the Passion-week, as it is appointed to be observed amongst us, could scarcely fail of attaining the salvation of his soul; so plain are the instructions given us throughout the whole course of our services, and so exclusively is Christ held forth to us as "the way, the truth, and the life." My dear Brethren, we really are great losers by our neglect of these seasons. Doubtless they *may be* observed with superstitious formality: but they *may be* kept with infinite profit to the soul. And I beg of you not to let the present opportunity pass away without a suitable improvement: but, as David said, with a direct reference to the Saviour's resurrection, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it[t];" so do

[i] Heb. x. 22. [k] Ps. li. 7. [l] 1 John i. 7.
[m] Heb. ii. 3. [n] 1 Cor. v. 7, 8. [o] Tit. ii. 14.
[p] Col. iii. 1. [q] Exod. xiii. 8—10. [r] Rom. xiv. 9.
[s] Exod. xii. 42. [t] Ps. cxviii. 22—24.

you engage with your whole souls in securing the blessings which the Redeemer's triumphs, as on this day, have obtained for us———]

## CCXII.

### CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

Deut. xviii. 13. *Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God.*

IT seems strange that any who have ever heard of Jehovah, should need to be put on their guard against alienating their hearts from him, and placing their affections on any created object in preference to him: but the Israelites, who had seen all his wonders in Egypt and in the wilderness, were ever prone to depart from him, even as we also are, notwithstanding all that we have heard respecting that infinitely greater redemption which he has vouchsafed to us through the incarnation and death of his only dear Son. Permit me, therefore, to remind you, as Moses reminded the people committed to his charge, that you must on no account, and in no degree, transfer to the creature the regards which are due to your Maker alone; since his injunction to you, and to every child of man, is, "Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God."

In order to bring home to your hearts and consciences this solemn injunction, I will,

I. Unfold its import—

As for absolute perfection, there is no hope of attaining it in this world. Job himself, whom God pronounced a "perfect man[a]," declared, that if he should arrogate to himself a claim of absolute perfection, his own mouth would condemn him, and prove him perverse[b]. But *uprightness* there is, and must be, in all who shall be approved of their God. In this sense, we must be perfect with the Lord our God:

1. In love to his name—

[We are commanded to "love God with all our heart

[a] Job i. 1, 8. [b] Job ix. 20, 21.

and mind and soul and strength." And every one of us should be able to say with David, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee[c]"———]

2. In affiance on his care—

[Whatever our trials be, there should be no leaning either upon our own strength or on any created power: for "cursed is the man that maketh flesh his arm, whose heart departeth from the Lord his God[d]." Our trust should be in God alone: and on him should we rely without the smallest measure of diffidence or fear. Our continual boast should be, "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear what either men or devils can do against me."]

3. In zeal for his glory—

[As we have received our all from him, so we should improve every thing for him. We should live entirely for our God: and, if only he may be glorified in us, it should be a matter of indifference to us, whether it be by life or by death. Are we called to *act?* We must resemble Asa, who, with impartial energy, dethroned his own mother for her idolatry, and ground her idols to dust[e]. Are we called to *suffer?* We should yield our bodies to be burned, rather than swerve an hair's breadth from the path of duty[f]. In the whole of our Christian course we should be "pressing forward continually towards the goal, if by any means we may obtain from God the prize of our high calling." *This* is the true nature of Christian perfection[g].]

Such being the injunction, I will proceed to,

II. Enforce its authority—

Without real integrity before God, we can have,

1. No comfort in our souls—

[A man may, by an overweening conceit of his own attainments, buoy himself up with somewhat of a pleasing satisfaction respecting his state: but there will be secret misgivings in hours of reflection, and especially in that hour when he is about to enter into the immediate presence of his God. Even at present, an insincere man feels no real delight in God: and a consciousness of that will occasionally disturb his ill-acquired peace. But the man whose heart is right with God will have a holy confidence before him; according as the Psalmist has said: "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace[h]." Hezekiah's

[c] Ps. lxxiii. 25. [d] Jer. xvii. 5. [e] 1 Kings xv. 13.
[f] Dan. iii. 17, 18. [g] Phil. iii. 15. [h] Ps. xxxvii. 37.

blissful retrospect, if not in its full extent, yet in good measure, will be his: "I bessech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight[l]!"]

2. No stability in our ways—

["A double-minded man will be unstable in all his ways[k]." Let but a sufficient temptation arise, and he will turn aside, even as Demas did, to the indulgence of his besetting sin. The stony-ground hearers, for want of a root of integrity within themselves, will fall away; and the thorny-ground hearers, not being purged from secret lusts, will never bring forth fruit unto perfection. It is "the honest and good heart" alone that will approve itself steadfast unto the end. But the upright man God will uphold under every temptation; as an inspired prophet has assured us: "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them whose heart is perfect towards him[l]."]

3. No acceptance with our God—

[We may deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive our God: "to him all things are naked and open:" and, however we be admired by our fellow-creatures, he will discern our true state; as he did that of the Church at Sardis; of whom he says, "I know that thou hast a name to live, but art dead: for I have not found thy ways perfect before God[m]." It is to no purpose to dissemble with him: for "he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins, and will give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings[n]."]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who are unable to ascertain with confidence their real state—

[Surely you should not suffer this to remain in doubt. Look into the Scriptures; and you will find in the saints of old a well-grounded persuasion that they had passed from death unto life. Real uprightness is like light, which carries its own evidence along with it. I would not encourage an ill-founded confidence: nor would I, on the other hand, encourage that kind of diffidence which puts away the consolations provided for us in the Gospel. Examine yourselves as before God; and never rest till you have the testimony of God's Spirit, that ye are Israelites indeed, in whom is no guile.]

[l] 2 Kings xx. 3. [k] Jam. i. 8. [l] 2 Chron. xvi. 9.
[m] Rev. iii. 1, 2. [n] Jer. xvii. 10.

2. Those who have an inward evidence that their hearts are right with God—

[What is there under heaven that can equal such a blessing as this? St. Paul himself had no greater joy[o]. For you, Brethren, death has no sting, and the day of judgment itself no terror. You may look and long for the coming of your Lord. Be thankful then; and let the brightness of your prospects increase your vigilance in the path of duty, that "ye may never fall, but have an entrance ministered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[p]."]

[o] 2 Cor. i. 12. [p] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11.

## CCXIII.

THE METHOD OF EXPIATING AN UNKNOWN MURDER.

Deut. xxi. 6—8. *And all the elders of that city, that are next unto the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley; and they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel, whom thou hast redeemed, and lay not innocent blood unto thy people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them.*

THE ceremonial law of the Jews was confessedly figurative and typical in every part: nor was even their judicial law altogether destitute of a spiritual import. The injunction, "not to muzzle the ox that trod out the corn," appears as void of any, except a literal, meaning, as any law whatever; yet was there in that law a particular reference to the preachers of the Gospel, who were to be supported by the people to whom they ministered. In the law that we are now to consider, there is indeed a manifest appearance of mystery: and we shall find it by no means unprofitable to consider the mystery contained in it. We shall endeavour then,

I. To explain the ordinance—

In doing this we must notice,

1. Its general design—

[God, no doubt, intended by this law, *to prevent the commission of murder.* The shedding of human blood was, in his eyes, so great a crime, that it must never be pardoned by the

civil magistrate. If a wilful murderer had fled to a city of refuge, or even to the altar itself, neither the one nor the other was to prove a sanctuary to him; he must be taken thence, and be carried forth for execution[a]. In the event of a slain man being found, and the murderer being unknown, this law was to be carried into effect: the elders of the city that was nearest to the slain man, (which, if doubtful, was to be ascertained by measurement,) were, together with the priests, to go to a rough valley, and there slay a heifer, and wash their hands over him, protesting their own innocence, and their inability to discover the offender; and in that manner to implore forgiveness for the guilty land[b]. Now this had a tendency to strike a terror into the minds of all the people, to fill them with an abhorrence of murder, to shew them what pains would be taken to discover the person who should be guilty of it, and what terrible vengeance he must expect at the hands of God, though he should escape the punishment that he deserved from man. Somewhat of a similar process obtains amongst us: a coroner's inquest is taken whenever a suspicion of murder or of suicide appears to have any just foundation. But there is no comparison between our law and that which existed amongst the Jews; so far superior was the solemnity of their proceedings; and so much more calculated to beget in the minds of men an abhorrence of the dreadful sin of murder.

But besides this more obvious end of the law, God designed also *to provide means for removing guilt from his land.* No sooner had the whole world sinned in Adam, than He devised means for their restoration to his favour through the incarnation and death of his only dear Son. And when "all flesh had corrupted their way before him," and determined him to execute vengeance upon them, he still waited to be gracious unto them, and sent them messages of mercy by the hands of Noah for the space of an hundred and twenty years. When the destruction of Nineveh was so imminent, that there remained but forty days before its completion, he sent them a prophet to warn them of their danger, and to bring them to repentance. Thus at all times has God been slow to anger, whilst the exercise of mercy was his delight. Now considering the wickedness of the human heart, it could not be but that sometimes murder should have been committed: and he had declared that, in that case, "the land could not be cleansed from blood but by the blood of him that shed it." Yet, as it must sometimes happen that the criminal could not be discovered, here was a method provided for expiating the guilt, so that his judgments might not fall upon any in this world, but only on

[a] See Numb. xxxv. 31, 33. Deut. xix. 11—13. and Exod. xxi. 14.
[b] ver. 1—9.

the criminal himself in the world to come. How amiable does God appear in this view! and how plainly may we see in this very ordinance that "judgment is a strange act," to which he is extremely averse; and that he is rich in mercy unto all them that call upon him!]

2. Its particular provisions—

[These deserve a minute attention. Some have thought that *the heifer which had not drawn in the yoke* represented the murderer, the son of Belial, who refused to bear the yoke of God's law; and that "*the rough valley* in which he was to be slain, denoted the worthlessness of the criminal's character, or the disagreeableness of the business[c]." But we apprehend that much more was designed by these particular appointments. The heifer that had *not drawn in the yoke* represented Christ, who, though he died under the curse of the law, had no previous obligation to do so, but did it voluntarily, giving himself freely for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour[d]. His death marked the utter excision which the murderer deserved; and *the rough valley* in which he was beheaded, marked the desolation, which the land itself merited for the transgression that had been committed[e]. Thus, the *victim*, the *death*, the *place*, all conspired to impress the minds of the beholders with the malignity of the offence, which required such a sacrifice; whilst the presence of the priests, which was especially required, (not to officiate themselves, but to overlook and direct the offices of others,) intimated the indispensable necessity of seeking pardon precisely in God's appointed way, and not in any method of their own devising[f]. To this sacrifice was to be added a public profession of their *personal* innocence, and, at the same time, a public acknowledgment of their *national* guilt: they must profess their innocence both by an appropriate sign, (*washing their hands over the slain heifer*,) and an express declaration; and they must acknowledge their guilt, with earnest supplications for mercy and forgiveness. Thus, namely, by their *protestations* and *petitions*, did they shew to all, that, as God would "not hear those who regarded iniquity in their hearts," so neither would he punish any, who should humble themselves before him in his appointed way. Truly, in this view, the ordinance, though merely judicial, was most interesting and most instructive.]

The mystical import of the ordinance being explained, we proceed,

[c] See Scott, on the place.
[d] Compare Numb. xix. 2. and Eph. v. 2.
[e] See Ps. cvii. 34. and Heb. vi. 8.
[f] Deut. xvii. 8—12.

II. To point out some lessons which may be learned from it—

We of course pass over those things which are less appropriate, and fix our attention upon those which seem to arise most naturally out of the subject before us.

We may learn then,

1. The importance of preventing or punishing sin—

[The concurrence of the elders and the priests in this ordinance shews, that magistrates and ministers should unite their efforts for the preservation of the public morals, and the averting of guilt from the land in which they dwell. To discourage, detect, and punish it, should be their constant endeavour; that the interests of society may not suffer, and that the honour of God may be maintained. The magistrate ought "not to bear the sword in vain:" he should be "a terror to evil-doers, and a revenger to execute wrath upon them:" and though it does not comport so well with the ministerial office to be exercising civil authority, the minister should be forward on every occasion to aid and stimulate to the utmost of his power those whom God has ordained to be his vicegerents upon earth ——— Were such a co-operation more common, the flagrant violations of the Sabbath, and a thousand other enormities which are daily committed in our streets, would vanish at least from public view, and in a great measure be prevented.

But it is not only *public* sin which should be thus discountenanced; the crimes perpetrated in *secret*, and especially the hidden abominations of our own hearts, should be carefully investigated by us, and unreservedly suppressed. Every one should consider sin, of whatever kind it be, as that "abominable thing which God hateth:" and should remember, that, though it should never be detected and punished in this world, God will expose it in the world to come, and manifest his righteous indignation against all who commit it. Then at least, if not now, "our sin will find us out:" and therefore it becomes us now with all diligence to search and try ourselves, and to beg of God also to "search and try us, to see if there be any wicked way in us, and to lead us in the way everlasting."]

2. The comfort of a good conscience—

[The persons who were thus solemnly to assert their innocence in the presence of God, would doubtless feel happy that they were able to make their appeal to him in truth. To do so with respect to all sin, would be impossible, because "there is no man that liveth and sinneth not:" but with respect to allowed and indulged sin, we all ought to be able to call God to witness

that we are free from it. We must be Israelites indeed, and without any allowed guile. And O! what a comfort is it when we can say with Job, "O God, thou knowest I am not wicked[g]!" Such was the comfort enjoyed by Paul; "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world[h]." When indeed we can make that appeal to God, we should do it with holy fear and jealousy, lest there should, after all, be some sin undiscovered by us. We should say with Paul, "Though I know nothing by myself, yet am I not hereby justified; but he that judgeth me is the Lord[i]." We may see in the instance of Pilate how awfully a man may deceive his own soul: he washed his hands before the multitude, and said, "I am free from the blood of this just person:" but his reluctance to commit sin could not excuse the actual commission of it; any more than the washing of his hands could cleanse his soul. Nevertheless we should labour to "keep a conscience void of offence," and so to have every evil disposition mortified, as to be able constantly to say with David, "I will wash my hands in innocency, O Lord, and so will I compass thine altar[k]."]

### 3. The efficacy of united faith and prayer—

[Great as the guilt of murder was, the Lord declared that it should not be imputed to the land, if this ordinance were duly complied with. And what sin is there that shall be imputed to us, if we look by faith to that great Sacrifice which was once offered for sin, and implore mercy from God "as his *redeemed people?*" Not even murder itself should be excepted, if the forgiveness of it were diligently sought in this manner. Hear how David prayed, after the murder of Uriah: "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness! Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow[l]." O glorious truth! "Though our sins be as crimson, they may be made white as snow." Beloved Brethren, see your guilt as already irrevocably contracted: see the judgments of God hanging over you: see death ready to execute its commission, and the jaws of hell opening to swallow you up. And now turn your eyes to the "heifer slain in the rough valley," and averting from you the wrath of an offended God: in that heifer, see the Lord Jesus Christ, who has "redeemed you from the curse of the law, being made a curse for you." To you, even to you, that

[g] Job x. 7. [h] 2 Cor. i. 12. [i] 1 Cor. iv. 4.
[k] Ps. xxvi. 6. [l] Ps. li. 2, 7, 14.

blessed Redeemer says, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth!" O look to Him, plead with him, trust in him! and "he will in no wise cast you out." *This* is "the violence by which the kingdom of heaven is taken," even the violence of faith and prayer; and this force shall never be exerted in vain[m].]

[m] Matt. xi. 12.

## CCXIV.

### BENEVOLENCE TOWARDS GOD'S ANCIENT PEOPLE.

Deut. xxiii. 3, 4. *An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever; because they met you not with bread and with water, when ye came forth out of Egypt.*

IN reading the history of God's ancient people, we shall do well to notice even the most minute occurrences; since there will scarcely be found one which is not capable of spiritual improvement, or one from which the most important lessons may not be derived. The record before us would be passed over by the generality of readers, as pertaining only to that particular dispensation, and as affording but little instruction for us at this time: yet does it in reality contain as great *practical* information as can be found in any of the more signal events with which the inspired history abounds. A thousand years after this record was written, it was referred to, not by accident, as we call it, but by the special direction of Divine Providence; and was made the ground of the most self-denying command that could be given to men; and the ground, also, of the most prompt obedience to that command, that it was possible for fallen man to render. The Jews after their return from Babylon had formed connexions with the heathen that had occupied Judea in their absence: but Nehemiah, determining to rectify this great evil, read to all the people the very words which I have now read to you; and, by his clear and unquestionable inferences from them, prevailed on all the people of the land to "separate themselves from the mixed multitude,"

and to act up to the spirit of the injunction there given[a]. Now it is to the *practical* improvement of them that I wish to direct your attention: and for that end I shall set before you,

I. The duty of benevolence in general—

It is a duty—

[Love is the very essence of all practical religion. It is in a most peculiar manner inculcated under the Christian dispensation; and it is to be exercised towards every child of man. God, who is love itself, "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain both on the just and unjust:" and our duty is to resemble him, and to be "perfect, even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect[b]." If we be doubtful how far this precept is to be obeyed, the parable of the good Samaritan gives us a clear and unerring direction[c]. No man under heaven can be so distant from us, but he is entitled to the offices of our love, so far as our opportunities and ability give scope for its exercise ———]

It is absolutely indispensable to our acceptance with God—

[Whatever else we may possess, yea, whatever we may either do or suffer for the Lord's sake, if we have not an active principle of love in our hearts, "we are only as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal[d]." St. John even appeals to us on this subject, and makes us judges in our own cause: "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him[e]?" In truth, the want of this principle, whatever else we may possess, will be adduced by our Judge, in the last day, as the ground of our eternal condemnation: "Depart, accursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels! for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me[f]."

Thus, then, as the Moabites and Ammonites are condemned for not administering to the necessities of Israel in the wilderness, so shall we, if we do not exercise benevolence towards our indigent fellow-creatures, to whatever sect or nation they belong, so far as it shall be in our power to afford them the relief which they stand in need of.]

[a] Neh. xiii. 1—3. [b] Matt. v. 44—48. [c] Luke x. 37.
[d] 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. [e] 1 John iii. 17. [f] Matt. xxv. 41—45.

Conceiving the general point established, that we should shew benevolence to all, I proceed to mark,

II. Our special obligation to exercise it towards God's ancient people—

The Jews have, at all events, the same claim to our benevolence as any other people whatever. There is no exception made in Scripture with respect to them: and, consequently, if we should fail in establishing their peculiar claims, our main argument would remain in all its force. But they have claims superior to any other people upon earth—

1. We are more indebted to them than to any other people under heaven—

[To whom are we indebted for all the instruction which we have received respecting the way of peace and salvation? We owe it all to Jews. We know nothing of God and of his Christ, but as it has been revealed to us by Jewish prophets and Apostles: yea, the very Saviour himself was of Jewish extraction: and, therefore, in that very fact we may well find a motive to exercise benevolence towards all who are related to him according to the flesh. Such infinite obligations as we owe to that people should surely be requited in acts of love towards their descendants; even as God himself often shewed mercy to *rebellious* Israel for Abraham's and for David's sake; and as David for Jonathan's sake spared Mephibosheth, who must otherwise, as a descendant of Saul, have been involved in the ruin of all his house[g].]

2. The very blessings which we enjoy were taken from them, on purpose that they might be transferred to us—

[The Jews were once the only people upon earth who possessed the blessings of salvation. But God, in righteous indignation, cast off them; and, in a way of sovereign grace and mercy, took us from a wild olive-tree, and grafted us in upon the stock from which they had been broken, and "from which they had been broken *on purpose that we might be grafted in*[h]." The fact is, that every soul amongst us, that now derives sap and nourishment from God's olive-tree, actually occupies, as it were, the place of a Jew, who has been dispossessed of his privileges, in order that we might enjoy them. Now, I would submit it to your own judgment: Suppose a person to have been disinherited by his father, on purpose that I, who

[g] 2 Sam. xxi. 7. [h] Rom. xi. 19, 20.

had no relation to him, nor any more worthiness in myself than the disinherited offender, might be made his heir: suppose that disinherited son, in a state of extreme distress, should ask alms of you, whilst I was living in affluence close at hand; would you not refer him to me, as the person who might well be expected to attend to his case, and to relieve his necessities? And, if I dismissed him from my door as a worthless vagabond, in whose welfare I had no concern, would you not feel surprise and grief, yea, and a measure of indignation too? And if I professed to be a man of piety and benevolence, would you not spurn at my profession, as downright hypocrisy? Now, then, if under such circumstances you would condemn me, know that "thou thyself art the man." For, all that thou hast of spiritual good was once the exclusive heritage of the Jew: and thou art possessing what has been taken from him; yea, thou art revelling in abundance, whilst he is perishing in utter want: and all the obligation which, by thine own confession, would attach to me in the case I have stated, is entailed on thee: and thou, in refusing to fulfil it, art sinning against God, and against thine own soul.]

3. This very transfer of their blessings to us has been made for the express purpose that we might dispense them to that bereaved people in the hour of their necessity—

[True, we are permitted to enjoy them ourselves, yea, and to enjoy them in the richest abundance: but we are particularly *intrusted with them for the benefit of the Jews.* Hear what God himself has declared on this subject: "As ye in times past (ye Gentiles) have not believed God, but have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also (these Jews) now not believed, that through your mercy they" *should be left to perish?* No: but that through your mercy they "also *may obtain mercy*[1]." Now, take again the case before stated: and suppose the man who had disinherited his son, and left me his estate, to have declared in his will, that he left me the estate *on purpose that in the hour of his son's extremity I might shew kindness to him, and relieve his necessities;* what would you say of me *then,* if I spurned him from my door, and left him to perish with hunger, when I was myself revelling in all manner of luxurious abundance? Well, "*Thou art the man:*" and what thou wouldest say of me, thou must say of thyself, as long as thou neglectest to promote the welfare of God's ancient people: yes, "out of thine own mouth shalt thou be judged, thou wicked servant." God has made thee a trustee for the Jew; and thou hast not only betrayed thy trust,

[1] Rom. xi. 30, 31.

but left him to perish, when thou hadst in possession all that his soul needs; and which thou couldest impart to him, to the full extent of his necessities, without feeling any sensible diminution of thy wealth; yea, when, strange to say! thou mightest increase thy wealth by relieving him. Tell me, then, in this view of the matter, whether thou hast not special obligations to shew benevolence to the Jew?]

But I must go further, and mark,

III. The more particular obligations which we have to exercise benevolence towards them at this time—

God, by his providence, called the Ammonites and Moabites to shew kindness to Israel; and their guilt was greatly aggravated by their manifesting such unwillingness to co-operate with him in his designs of love towards them: and on this account was so heavy a judgment denounced against them, "even to their tenth generation." And is not God now calling us to concur with him in what he is doing for his ancient people? Yes; I think his call to us is clear and loud. Observe,

1. The interest which is now felt in the Christian world for their restoration to God—

[This interest is really unprecedented. There have been times when a few persons have laboured for their welfare: but now there is, throughout Europe and America, a very great and general increase of kindness towards them. They are no longer made the universal objects of hatred and persecution, as in former ages: even where there is no love towards them, there is a great diminution of hostility: and in many instances they have been treated with much liberality and candour by Christian governments, being raised by them to a measure of respect and honour that has not been accorded to them in former times. And for their conversion to Christianity, and their restoration to the divine favour, exertions are making to a considerable extent — — — And is not this of the Lord? Methinks, *such a victory over the prejudices of Christians* is scarcely less a work of divine power, than was the deliverance of Israel from the hand of the Egyptians: and, as such, it is a call from God to concur with him in his labours of love towards them. See what is at this moment doing amongst the more religious part of the Christian community, in the circulation of the Scriptures, and especially of the New Testament;

and what efforts are making by Christian missionaries for the conversion of the Jews! and I must say, that this is a call from God to us, and that it is no less our privilege, than it is our duty, to obey it.]

2. The stir which prevails amongst the Jews themselves—

[This also obtains to a degree unprecedented since the early ages of Christianity. "Verily, there is a stir amongst the dry bones throughout the whole valley of vision[k]." Great numbers of Jews, upon the continent especially, and to a certain extent at home also, begin to think that Christianity *may be* true; and that that Jesus, whom their fathers crucified, *may be* the Messiah: and, if they did but know how, in the event of their embracing Christianity, they might support themselves and their families, great multitudes, I doubt not, would prosecute their inquiries, till they had attained the true knowledge of their Messiah and of his salvation. Let me then ask, Whence is this? Is not this the work of God? And is it not an encouragement to us to exert ourselves for their entire conversion? Methinks "they are saying to us, Come over to Macedonia, and help us;" and we ought, one and all of us, according to our ability, to obey the call.]

3. The earnests which God has given us in the actual conversion of some to the faith of Christ—

[If we cannot speak of Pentecostal days, we can declare, that God has accompanied his word with power to the hearts of some; and that "one of a city and two of a tribe" have already, as God has given us reason to expect[l], been brought to the saving knowledge of their Messiah. Of those who have embraced "the truth as it is in Jesus," some have attained to a real eminence in the divine life, and are at this moment not inferior to the most exalted characters in the Christian world. This shews that God is about to rebuild his temple: and surely it does not become us "to dwell in our ceiled houses" at ease[m], when he is so plainly calling upon us to co-operate with him: we should rather "strengthen the hands of those who are labouring in this good work," and, like Cyrus, afford every possible facility for the accomplishment of this vast and glorious undertaking[n]. We should endeavour to improve "this acceptable time[o];" removing to the utmost of our power all obstacles to their conversion[p]; and labouring, if by any means we may be God's honoured instruments, to bring them home to him, and to present them as "an offering in a clean vessel to the Lord[q]."]

[k] Ezek. xxxvii. 7, 8. [l] Isai. xvii. 6. [m] Hagg. i. 4. [n] Ezra i. 5, 6, 7.
[o] Isai. xlix. 8. [p] Isai. lxii. 10. [q] Isai. lxvi. 19, 20.

4. The general voice of prophecy—

[Prophecy begins to be better understood amongst us: and it is the united conviction of all who have studied the prophecies, that the time for the restoration and conversion of the Jews is nigh at hand. The twelve hundred and sixty years spoken of by Daniel, as the period fixed in the divine counsels for the establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom among them, are, on any computation, nearly expired. Ought we not then, like Daniel, to put forth our prayers to God for the consummation of this great event, and by all possible means to help it forward?

I think, that, putting all these circumstances together—the concern of Christians, the stir among the Jews, the real converts from among them, and the unquestionable ground which is given us in prophecy to expect their speedy conversion—we may regard it all as a call from God, scarcely less powerful than that given to the Moabites and Ammonites of old, to "come to the help of the Lord," and to labour with all our might for their salvation. In truth, if we do not act thus, we can expect nothing but "the curse of God[r]," and the most lasting tokens of his displeasure.]

1. You will say, perhaps, that *You have no connexion with the Jews*, and therefore may well be excused from all concern about them—

[But what had the Ammonites and Moabites to do with the Jews? *They* were descended, not from Abraham, but from Lot, and had never had any intercourse with them. But this was no excuse for their neglect: nor can any similar excuse avail for us.]

2. You will reply, that *it is God's work*, and that it should be left to him to accomplish it in his own time and way—

[And might not the Ammonites and Moabites say the same? God not only *could*, but *did*, supply their wants by miracle: but this was no justification of those who refused to them the proper offices of love. Nor will this be any justification of *our* neglect.]

Permit me, in CONCLUSION, to bring two things to your remembrance:

1. That the Ammonites and Moabites had an excuse which you have not—

[They might have said, These Israelites are going to extirpate the seven nations of Canaan: and we will not concur

[r] Judg. v. 23.

in such a work as this. But, in converting the Jews to Christ, we adopt the readiest and most certain way for the salvation of the whole world. If *they*, then, were excluded from the congregation of the Lord, even to the tenth generation, for their inhumanity, judge what tokens of God's displeasure await *you* for yours.]

2. That *they* were condemned for not coming forth, as volunteers, to "meet Israel with bread and water"—

[What shall you then be, who are thus entreated and solicited to concur with Jehovah in this good work, if you still refuse your aid, or give it with such indifference, as to shew that your heart does not go forth with your hands in the service of the Lord? You remember, that when Nabal said, "Shall I take my bread and my water, and give them to those whom I know not whence they be?" it well nigh cost him his life; yea, it actually did cost him his life[s]. And I tremble to think what judgments await you, if ye resist our importunity, and refuse to co-operate with God in the work proposed. But "I hope better things of you, my Brethren, though I thus speak;" and I hope and trust that you will henceforth, each according to his ability, be workers together with God for the salvation of God's ancient people, and through them for the salvation of the whole world. And let me not be misunderstood: I am far from intending to say that all who have neglected this sacred cause are equally obnoxious to God's displeasure; for it is but lately that the attention of the Christian world has been called to it: but I think you will agree with me, that it is now high time to exert ourselves for God, and to redeem, as far as possible, the time we have lost. The cause well deserves our most assiduous efforts: and we may be sure, that God, who so indignantly resented the supineness of the Ammonites, will richly repay all that we can do for the furtherance of his gracious designs: for he has said, "Blessed is he that blesseth thee; and cursed is he that curseth thee."]

[s] 1 Sam. xxv. 11, 21, 22, 37, 38.

## CCXV.

### GOD'S CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Deut. xxiii. 5. *The Lord thy God would not hearken unto Balaam: for the Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the Lord thy God loved thee.*

TO those who are ignorant of the way of salvation, we preach Christ crucified: for "there is no other

name under heaven but his, whereby any man can be saved." But to those who are well instructed in the fundamental truths of our holy religion, we bring forward rather what relates to the life of godliness: having laid the foundation, we endeavour to build upon it a suitable superstructure. Now, a realizing sense of God's care and love, such a sense of his goodness as leads us to live altogether by faith upon him, is one of the sublimest attainments that can be made in this world. And to assist you in this, will be my endeavour at this time.

Let us notice, then, from the words before us,

I. God's love to his ancient people—

This appeared in bringing them forth out of Egypt, and in preserving them throughout their wanderings in the wilderness; and especially, also, in the instance that is here specified, the counteracting of the designs of Balaam, and "the turning of his curse into a blessing unto them."

See the account given us by Moses—

[To enter fully into this, the whole history of the transaction, the 22d, 23d, and 24th chapters of the Book of Numbers should be attentively perused. Instigated by a desire to obtain "the wages of unrighteousness," yet conscious that he was under a restraint from the Most High God, Balaam madly pursued his object, even after he was rebuked for his iniquity by the beast on which he rode, and which was enabled to utter the reproof in language used by man[a]. He constantly confesses his inability to go beyond what Jehovah should see fit to permit; yet as constantly sought to evade or change the divine counsels, and to execute the project for which he was hired. Every distinct prophecy which he utters, rises in force and grandeur: and when complained of by Balak for pouring forth blessings upon them, instead of denouncing curses against them, he confesses, "I have received commandment to bless: and God hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it[b]." At last, finding how vain it was to seek by enchantments to alter the divine purpose, he forbore to offer any more of his sacrifices, and yielded to the impulse within him to foretell the certain successes of those whom he had sought to destroy[c]. And, having thus provoked the king of Moab to dismiss him without

[a] 2 Pet. ii. 15, 16. [b] Numb. xxiii. 20. [c] Numb. xxiv. 1—9.

the promised rewards[d], he resumed his prophetic strains, and declared, not only that this people should triumph over Moab, but that from them should One arise, who should establish an universal empire, and have dominion over the whole world[e].

All this, Joshua brought to the remembrance of Israel, long after they had been established in the land of Canaan; saying, "Balak the son of Zippor arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you: but I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you STILL: so I delivered you out of his hand[f]."]

Now all this was the fruit of God's unchanging love—

[God had chosen them to himself in Abraham, and had ordained that they should be to him a peculiar people above all others upon the face of the whole earth. In this choice of them he had been influenced, not by any foreseen worthiness in them; for he knew, from the beginning, what a stiff-necked people they would prove; but solely by his own sovereign will and pleasure: "He loved them because he would love them[g]." To them, also, had he promised the land of Canaan: and therefore, when the time was come for their possession of it, no enemy could stand before them, nor could any conspiracies which could be formed prevail against them. Hence, in despite of all the efforts which Balaam made to curse them, he was constrained to "bless them *still*."]

From the whole of God's kindness to them, we may be led to contemplate,

II. His love to his Israel at this day—

His people are now redeemed, even as they were of old, only from infinitely sorer bondage, a bondage to sin and Satan, to death and hell. They are brought also through a dreary wilderness, towards the heavenly Canaan. They have enemies also to contend with. True it is, they have not to dispossess any of their land; nor do they, by invading the property of others, provoke hostility: but they have enemies notwithstanding, yea, and enemies who are bent upon their destruction: but from all of them God will surely deliver his redeemed people.

[d] Numb. xxiv. 10—14. [e] Numb. xxiv. 15—19.
[f] Josh. xxiv. 9, 10. [g] Deut. vii. 6—9.

He will deliver them both from men and devils—

[From the beginning of the world have God's chosen people been opposed and persecuted, even from the time of Abel to the present hour. It was the superior piety of Abel that called forth the resentment of the envious Cain, and stimulated him to imbrue his hands in his brother's blood[h]. And our Lord puts the question to his malignant enemies, "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" It might be thought, indeed, that it would be impossible for any one to hate and persecute the holy Jesus, in whose whole life not a single flaw could be found, and who, by his benevolent and unnumbered miracles, must have endeared himself to every one. But the brighter his light was, the more were the children of darkness incensed against him; so that they never ceased, till they had prevailed against him, and "crucified the Lord of Glory." All his Apostles, too, were objects of the world's hatred: and our Lord has told us, that all his followers will have their cross to bear, after the example which he has set us. And do we not find it so? Is there a faithful servant of the Lord, especially if he fill any important station, and be active in honouring his Divine Master—is there one, I say, that is not reviled and persecuted for righteousness' sake? True, fires are not now kindled, as once they were, to consume them, because the laws of the land forbid it: but it is as true at this day as ever it was in the apostolic age, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

And has the hostility of Satan at all abated? Does not "that roaring lion go about at this day as much as ever, seeking whom he may devour?" What can the Apostle mean, when he says, "We wrestle not with flesh and blood, (not with flesh and blood *only*,) but with principalities and powers, and spiritual wickednesses in high places[i]?" Or for what end are we still enjoined to "put on the whole armour of God[k]," if we have not still many enemies to contend with?

But God will preserve us from them all, and "turn their curses into blessings." Whatsoever will ultimately advance our welfare, he will permit: but whatsoever would have an injurious effect, he will avert; as it is said, "The wrath of man shall praise thee; and the remainder of it shalt thou restrain[l]." We may not see the precise way in which good shall be brought out of evil: Joseph could form no idea of the benefit which was ultimately to accrue from all his trials; nor could Job from his: but they were constrained to acknowledge, that, however designed for evil, the events, every one of them, issued in good: and thus has God engaged, that "all

[h] 1 John iii. 12. [i] Eph. vi. 12. [k] Eph. vi. 13. [l] Ps. lxxvi. 10.

things shall work together for his people's good[m];" and that their "light and momentary afflictions shall work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory[n]."]

To this Almighty God is pledged, by the love that he bears towards us—

[God has loved his people with an everlasting love; and therefore with loving-kindness he both draws us to him[o], and secures our welfare. Now, the record in my text is especially intended by God himself to illustrate and confirm this truth. Hear what God says by the Prophet Micah: "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal, *that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord*[p]." God is a righteous and faithful God; and he has engaged, that "no weapon that is formed against his people shall prosper," and that "none shall prevail against them to pluck them out of his hands:" we may be perfectly assured, therefore, that he will keep them to the end; and that "not one jot or tittle of his word will ever fail." "Having loved his own, he will love them to the end[q]."]

I close with a word or two of ADVICE—

1. Be not hasty in your anticipations of evil as the result of your trials—

[Jacob, on the loss of his favourite son Joseph, exclaimed, "All these things are against me!" But *that* was the very event which God had ordained for the preservation of himself and his whole family; yea, and for the completion of all his promises respecting the Messiah, and the salvation of the whole world by him. And perhaps that very trial, of which we are ready to complain, is, according to his eternal purpose, to be the destined means of preserving us from destruction, and of preparing us for glory. Wait, and "see the *end* of the Lord[r];" and you will find as much reason to bless God for your severest troubles, as for the most acceptable of all his blessings.]

2. Learn in every dispensation to acknowledge a Father's love—

[There is not, in fact, any single trial that does not proceed from God. "Not a hair of your head can fall" but by his gracious permission. Men, devils, yea the very elements, are only instruments in his hands to fulfil his will[s]. The Jews, in crucifying the Messiah, executed only "what God's

[m] Rom. viii. 28. [n] 2 Cor. iv. 17. [o] Jer. xxxi. 3. [p] Mic. vi. 5.
[q] John xiii. 1. [r] Jam. v. 11. [s] Isai. x. 5. Ps. cxlviii. 8.

will and counsel had determined before to be done[t]:" and, though "they neither meant nor thought so," they were his agents, to accomplish what was necessary for the redemption of the world. Men and devils may have prepared a furnace for you: but it is God who puts you into it, to purify you from your dross, and to "bring you forth as vessels meet for the Master's use." True, he will punish those agents; as he did Balaam, who was slain amongst the enemies of God: but you "he will make perfect through sufferings," and recompense in proportion to all that you have endured for him.]

[t] Acts iv. 28.

## CCXVI.

### GLEANING, A DIVINE ORDINANCE.

Deut. xxiv. 19—22. *When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive-tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember, that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing*[a].

IT is surprising to see to what minute things Jehovah condescends in his legislation to the Jews. In no other community under heaven were such things accounted worthy of distinct and authoritative enactments. People must not yoke together in a plough an ox and an ass. They must not seethe a kid in its mother's milk. In taking a bird's nest, they must not take the dam with her young. But "God, their great Lawgiver, is love:" and all his laws breathed love, not to men only, but to the whole creation: and by them he has shewn, that he desired all his people to live under the influence of this divine principle; and, in the smallest matters no less than in

[a] If this be a *Charity Sermon*, the triple repetition of "the Stranger, the Fatherless, and the Widow," must, of course, be more largely insisted on.

the greatest, to bring it into exercise. Hence he appointed, that, when they gathered in the fruits of the earth, they should guard against selfishness, and manifest a spirit of love towards their more indigent and afflicted brethren. In the very words which I have just read, the *threefold repetition of them* shews what tenderness there is in the bosom of Almighty God towards the poor and afflicted, and how desirous he is that all his people should resemble him: and for this end he commands, that, in the season of their own prosperity, they should be especially mindful of "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow." The manner in which he enforces this command respecting gleaning, will lead me to consider,

I. The privilege of gleaning, as accorded to the Jews—

The Jews had been brought out from Egypt from the sorest bondage—

[By mighty signs and wonders had God brought them out: and had throughout all their generations caused them to enjoy blessings for which they had not laboured, and to reap an harvest which they had never sown. For the space of forty years in the wilderness they had no occasion for agricultural labours; but from day to day did they glean around their tents the food which the Great Proprietor of all caused to be scattered for their use. And when they came into the promised land, "they found there great and goodly cities which they had never built, and houses filled with all manner of good things which they had never filled, and wells which they had never digged[b]." Like gleaners, they had only to enter on the field, and to appropriate every thing which they found to their own use ———]

From this consideration they were enjoined to give somewhat of a like advantage to their poorer brethren—

["Freely they had received; and freely they were to give." They were to bear in mind the misery from which their forefathers had been delivered; and from a sense of gratitude to their Heavenly Benefactor, they were to shew love to their brethren, and liberality to the poor. They were not to be exact even in the reaping of their crops, but to leave the corners of their fields standing[c] for the benefit of "the stranger,

[b] Deut. vi. 10, 11. [c] Lev. xix. 9.

the fatherless, and the widow:" and, after having gathered in their corn, or their grapes, or olives, they were not to be going over their ground or their trees again, but to leave the remaining produce for those whose necessities called for such aid; yea, and to rejoice in seeing the wants of others supplied, though at their expense. And surely this was reasonable in the highest degree, since the whole land itself had been originally the gift of God, as was also the produce of it in every successive year. What could their own labours effect without the fruitful showers and the genial warmth of the sun? On God they depended, notwithstanding their own efforts: and God gave them an assurance, that on a cheerful and liberal discharge of their duty towards their brethren, they should receive his blessing on their own labours.]

But let me proceed to mark,

II. The far higher grounds of this privilege as existing amongst *us*—

True, the Jewish law does not extend to *us:* nor does the law of this land accord in this respect with the Jewish law. The matter has been tried, and authoritatively decided. But, so general is the sense of propriety which exists in this kingdom, that the privilege of gleaning is conceded to the poor, as much as if it were a right established by law: and I suppose that *for every thousand pounds that are paid in rent to the proprietor of the soil, not less than one hundred pounds, and perhaps two hundred, are gratuitously left to be gathered by the poor in the way of gleaning.* And this is as it should be. For—

Let it be recollected from what misery we have been redeemed—

[Not an Egyptian bondage merely was ours, but a bondage to sin and Satan, death and hell. And what has the Great Proprietor of heaven and earth done for us? He has, by the blood of his only dear Son, brought us out from this bondage; and in the field of his Gospel has strewed a rich profusion of food, of which all of us may eat, and live for ever. Take the inspired volume: *there* is the field, into which all may enter, and gather for themselves. The promises there scattered, and *standing*, as it were, *in every corner*[d] of the Bible, are sufficient for the whole world. All that is required is, that we go in, and glean for ourselves. The manna in the wilderness

[d] Lev. xix. 9.

nourished those only who gathered it for their daily use: and, if the poor will avail themselves of the bounty scattered in our fields, they must go out and gather it. Were all the harvest left upon the field, it would benefit none, unless it were reaped and appropriated to our use: so all the promises of salvation will have been given to us in vain, if we do not exert ourselves, from day to day, to appropriate them to ourselves, for our own personal benefit. But, if we will "labour thus for the meat that endureth unto eternal life, the Son of Man will give it us" according to the utmost extent of our necessities. Then shall we gather *all* the blessings, both of grace and glory; for no one of which have we any other claim, than as gratuitous largesses, bestowed by the Lord of the harvest on his necessitous and dependent vassals.]

And can we have any stronger argument than this for liberality to the poor?

[Methinks, "the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow," should be made to share our temporal blessings, when we are so richly and gratuitously nourished with those which are spiritual and eternal. We are taught to "love one another, *as Christ has loved us*[e]." And when St. Paul was urging the Corinthian Church to liberality, he could find no stronger argument than this; "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich[f]." Say, Brethren, whether this consideration be not amply sufficient to animate us to the most enlarged liberality for his sake? Yes, truly; instead of grudging to others the remnants of our harvest, we should be ready to say with Zacchæus, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor[g]." Indeed, even for our own sakes we might practise this divine lesson: for "if we give to the poor, we lend to the Lord; and whatsoever we lay out, he will pay us again." In truth, to "honour the Lord with our substance, and with the first-fruits of all our increase, is the way, the surest way, to fill our barns with plenty, and to make our presses burst out with new wine[h]." But I rather dwell on the other motive only; because the "love of Christ," if duly felt in our hearts, "will constrain us" to every possible exercise of love to him, and to the poor for his sake[i].]

Let me now, then, ADDRESS you all—

1. As Gleaners, avail yourselves of your privilege—

[I say again, the whole field is open before you: and, as God's servant, I have been commissioned to "scatter handfuls

[e] Eph. v. 2. [f] 2 Cor. viii. 9. [g] Luke xix. 8.
[h] Prov. iii. 9, 10. [i] Matt. xxv. 45.

for you," that you may not labour in vain: yea, I have invited you to "come, even amongst the sheaves;" and, so far from "reproaching you" for your boldness, have encouraged you[k] by the strongest assurances of the unbounded liberality of my Divine Master. Bear in mind, that you are gleaners. You must indeed labour with diligence: but the whole that you gather is *a gift:* you never raised by your own personal labour one single grain of what you gather: all your labour consists in gathering up what the Great Proprietor, your Lord and Saviour, has strewed for you. Whilst you, then, have all the benefit, let him have all the glory.]

2. As Proprietors, perform the duty that is here enjoined you—

[Cultivate, every one of you, a spirit of liberality. Let "the stranger" share your bounty; and let "the fatherless and widows" be the special objects of your care and tender compassion. If you comply not readily with this injunction, what pretensions can you have to call yourselves followers of Christ? "If any man see his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him[l]?" "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" On the other hand, "abound in the riches of liberality;" and "so shall your light break forth as the morning[m]," and "a recompence be given you at the resurrection of the just[n]."]

[k] Ruth ii. 16.
[l] 1 John iii. 17.
[m] Isai. lviii. 7, 8.
[n] Luke xiv. 14.

## CCXVII.

### GRATITUDE TO GOD ENFORCED.

Deut. xxvi. 3—6. *And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the country which the Lord sware unto your fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the Lord thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father.*

THE ceremonial law is considered in general as a system of burthensome rites, that had in themselves no intrinsic value, and were useful only as prefiguring the mysteries of the Gospel. But though this view of it is in a measure just, yet we may disparage

that law too much; because there was in many of its ordinances a proper tendency to generate divine affections. In the law before us, certain professions were required to be made at the same time that the first-fruits were presented: and the words that were put into the mouths of the offerers, reminded them of the obligations which they owed to God, and, consequently, were suited to excite, as well as to express, their gratitude to God. As far as respected the deliverance of that people from Egypt, there is no further occasion for the law; and therefore it is superseded with the rest of the Jewish ritual: but as an intimation of the high value which God sets on grateful recollections, it is worthy of our highest regard.

We shall take occasion from it,

I. To point out our duty in reference to the mercies we have received—

We surely ought not to receive them like the brute beasts, which have no understanding: it is our duty to act as intelligent creatures; and to make the mercies of our God an occasion of augmented benefit to our souls. For this purpose we ought,

1. To review them frequently—

[Even *national* mercies ought not to be overlooked by us. It was to them in a peculiar manner that the ordinance before us had respect. The Jews were required not only to look back to the deliverance of their nation from Egypt, but to trace back their origin to Jacob their father, whose mother was a Syrian, who himself married two Syrian women, and himself lived in Syria for twenty years; whose children also, with the exception of Benjamin, were all born in Syria, and were the heads and progenitors of all the Jewish tribes. He on many occasions was near perishing: when he fled from the face of Esau, when he was followed by Laban his father-in-law, and when he was met again by Esau at the head of four hundred men, he was in danger of being destroyed: in which case his children would either never have existed, or would all have been destroyed with him. But God had preserved him from every danger, and brought his posterity to Canaan agreeably to his promise: and they in grateful remembrance of this were to profess it openly from year to year; "A Syrian ready to perish was our father."

Perhaps it rarely occurs to our minds that we have quite as much reason for gratitude on a national account as even the

Jews themselves: but, if we call to mind the state of our forefathers, who were as ignorant of God as the most savage Indians, and remember, that we ourselves should have been bowing down to stocks and stones just like them, if the light of the Gospel had not been sent to dispel our darkness, we shall see that we may well adopt the language of our text and say, "A Syrian ready to perish was our father."

But we should be careful also to review our *personal* mercies. Let us look back to the weakness of infancy, the thoughtlessness of childhood, the folly of youth, and see how marvellously God has preserved us to the present hour, whilst millions have been cut off by a premature death, or left to protract a miserable existence in pain, or infamy, or want. The means by which we have been rescued from danger, and even the minutest occurrences that have contributed to our deliverance, are worthy of our most attentive survey, and must be distinctly viewed, if ever we would "understand aright the loving-kindness of the Lord." We must not however dwell solely, or even chiefly, on *temporal* mercies, but must raise our thoughts to those which are *spiritual*. What matter for reflection will *these* afford! If we consider the former blindness and ignorance of our minds, the hardness and depravity of our hearts, the indifference which we manifested towards the concerns of eternity, and the awful danger in which we stood, what reason have we to bless our God that he did not take us away in such a state! And, if we can say, as in our text, that "we are come unto the country which the Lord sware unto our fathers for to give us," and *are* "partakers of his promise in Christ Jesus," then have we indeed cause for thankfulness, even such cause, as we may well reflect upon to the latest hour of our lives ——— On these then we should "muse till the fire burn, and we be constrained to speak of them with our tongues." In the ordinance before us a particular season was appointed for this exercise: and it is well to have seasons fixed upon in our own minds for a more solemn commemoration of the mercies received by us. If the commencement of the new year, for instance, or our birth-day, were regularly dedicated to this service, it could not be better spent. But, if our minds be duly impressed with a sense of God's goodness to us, we shall not be satisfied with allotting one particular period to the contemplation of it, but shall be glad to think and speak of it every day we live.]

2. To requite them gratefully—

[The Israelites were appointed to offer the first-fruits of the earth to God, in token that they acknowledged him as the Proprietor and Giver of all that they possessed. Now it is not necessary that we should present the same specific offerings as

they; but we must dedicate to God the *first-fruits* of *our time*, and the first-fruits of *our property*. We should fear the Lord in our youth, and not think it sufficient to give him the gleanings and the dregs of life — — — and we should "honour him with our substance, and with the *first-fruits* of all our increase;" "giving liberally, if we have much, and, if we have but little, doing our diligence gladly to give of that little." But chiefly should we consecrate *ourselves* to God: for we ourselves are, as the Apostle calls us, "a kind of *first-fruits* of God's creatures[a]." Our bodies and our souls, together with all their faculties and powers, are his: "We are not our own; we are bought with a price; and to honour him is our bounden duty." This is the very intent of God's mercies to us; nor do we ever requite them as we ought, till we "present ourselves to God as living sacrifices," and "glorify him with our bodies and our spirits which are his." This surrender of ourselves to him should be most solemn and devout. The image in our text admirably illustrates it: The priest took the basket that contained the first-fruits, and "*set it down before the altar of the Lord his God.*" Thus should we go into the very presence of our God, and dedicate ourselves to him, as his peculiar people. Rather, if we may so speak, we should put ourselves into the hands of our great High-Priest, that he may "present us holy and unblamable, and unreprovable in his sight."]

Such is obviously our duty. We proceed now,

II. To recommend it to your attention—

Persons in general are ready to defer the performance of this duty under an idea that it pertains not to them, at least not at present, and that an attention to it would deprive them of much happiness: but we must press upon your consciences the observance of it; for it is,

1. An universal duty—

[Who is there that has not received innumerable mercies for which he has reason to be thankful? Verily, marvellous as are the displays of God's goodness recorded in the Scriptures, there is no man who might not find as wonderful records of it in his own life, if he could trace all the dispensations of Providence towards him, as clearly and minutely as they are marked in the inspired volume towards God's people of old — — —

But there is one point wherein all mankind are upon a level: we may all look back to the state of Adam after he had fallen, and had reduced himself and all his posterity to ruin. How

[a] Jam. i. 18.

awful our condition *then!* Truly we should have been for ever like the fallen angels, destitute of all help or hope, if God had not marvellously interposed to rescue us from death and hell by the sacrifice of his only dear Son. With what emphasis then may every one of us say, "A Syrian ready to perish was our father!" Here all the wonders of redeeming love unfold themselves to our view——— and he who has no heart to adore God for them, has no evidence, no hope, of any interest in them———]

2. A reasonable duty—

[If we have conferred favours on any person for years together, do we not expect our kindness to be acknowledged and requited as opportunities shall occur? Do we not look with abhorrence upon a man that is insensible to all the obligations that can be heaped upon him? But what are the kindnesses which we can shew to a fellow-creature in comparison of those which we have received from God?——— Shall we then expect a tribute of gratitude from him, and think ourselves at liberty to withhold it from our Heavenly Benefactor?——— Let the world ridicule devotion, if they will, and call the love of God enthusiasm: but we will maintain it, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," and that an entire surrender of ourselves to him is "a reasonable service"——— Do we inquire, whence it is that ungodly men regard the sublimer exercises of religion as unnecessary and absurd? We answer, They have never considered what obligations they owe to God. Only let them once become acquainted with "the height and depth and length and breadth of the love of Christ," and they will see, that reason, no less than revelation, demands of us this tribute; and that every enlightened mind must of necessity accord with that of the Psalmist, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits he has done unto me?" "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name!"]

3. A delightful duty—

[In the passage before us it is associated with joy[b]: and indeed, what is such a service but a foretaste of heaven itself? Did any one ever engage in it, and not find his soul elevated by it to a joy which nothing else could afford? Let any one ruminate on earthly things, and his meditations will only augment his cares, or at best inspire him with a very transient joy. Let him dwell upon his own corruptions, and, though they are a proper subject of occasional meditation, they will only weigh down his spirits, and perhaps lead him to desponding fears. But let the goodness of God, and the wonders of redeeming love,

[b] ver. 11.

be contemplated by him, and he will soon have his mind raised above earthly things, and fired with a holy ambition to honour and to resemble God. See how the Psalmist expresses his thoughts on such occasions[c]: what glorious language! how sublime must have been the feelings of his soul, when uttering it before God! Know ye then that this is the state to which we would invite you, and that the daily experience of it is the best preparative for the joys above.]

[c] Ps. cxlv. 1—7.

## CCXVIII.

### COVENANTING WITH GOD EXPLAINED.

Deut. xxvi. 17—19. *Thou hast avouched the Lord this day to be thy God, and to walk in his ways, and to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and to hearken unto his voice: and the Lord hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the Lord thy God, as he hath spoken.*

THE covenant which was made with the Jews at Mount Horeb, though materially different from that which exists under the Christian dispensation, was yet intended to shadow forth that which all of us are called upon to enter into with our God. The Jewish covenant had respect in a great measure to temporal blessings, the bestowment of which was suspended entirely on their performance of certain conditions: whereas ours relates altogether to spiritual blessings; and though it has conditions as well as theirs, it provides strength for the performance of them, and thereby secures from failure all those who cordially embrace it. We may take occasion therefore from the words before us to consider,

I. Our covenant engagements—

The Jews were required to "avouch," or profess openly, their acceptance of God as their God, and their determination to obey his will in all things; and such are the engagements which we also are

called to take upon ourselves under the Christian dispensation:

1. To accept God as our God—

[The Jews had most satisfactory evidence that Jehovah was the only true God, and that he alone was worthy to be worshipped and adored. But, great as were the evidences of his kindness towards them, they are nothing in comparison of the demonstrations of his love to us. The gift of his only dear Son to die for us must for ever eclipse every other expression of his love[a]: and this peculiarly distinguishes the view in which we are to accept him: we must regard him as our *incarnate* God, as "God IN *Christ Jesus*, reconciling the world unto himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them." Think a moment what is implied in such an acceptance of God: it supposes, that we feel our guilty, helpless, and hopeless state by nature; that we see the suitableness and sufficiency of the provision which God has made for us in the Son of his love; and that we are determined to have no dependence on any thing but on the meritorious death and the all-sufficient grace of the Lord Jesus———

But it is not merely a secret determination which God requires: that determination must be *avowed;* we must "avouch" him to be the Lord *our* God. We must not be ashamed of Christ, but must "confess him before men," and be as bold in acknowledging him, as the ungodly are in their allegiance to the god of this world———]

2. To act towards him as becomes us in that relation—

[Universal obedience to his commands was promised by the Jews of old; and the same must be promised by us also. We need not attempt to discriminate between the various terms here used: *this* we are sure is intended by them, that we are to yield obedience to *the whole of his will* as far as we know it, neither regarding any thing as unworthy of our notice, nor any thing as too difficult for us to perform: we must "hearken to his voice," *as the angels in heaven do*[b], with an unwearied solicitude to know more of his will, and an incessant readiness to comply with the first intimations of it. We must be searching and meditating continually to find out what he speaks to us in his written word; and be listening also attentively to the still small voice of his Spirit, speaking to us in our consciences: and, whatever we ascertain to be his mind and will, that we are to do without hesitation, and without reserve.

Now *this* we must determine through grace to do. We must

[a] Rom. v. 8. [b] Ps. ciii. 20.

not come to God only as a *Saviour* to *deliver* us, but also as a *Lord* to *govern* us: and we must resolve that henceforth "no other Lord shall have dominion over us." Nor must this determination be kept secret: this also must be *avowed:* we must let it be seen "whose we are, and whom we serve;" and must evince a firmness in his service which neither the terrors nor allurements of the world can ever shake — — —]

Precisely corresponding with our engagements are,

II. Our covenant advantages—

God affords us ample encouragement to "lay hold on his covenant;" for he avows his determination,

1. To own us as his people—

[The very moment that we look to Christ as "all our salvation and all our desire," God will set his seal upon us as "his peculiar treasure." Just as a person who has bought any thing of great value, regards it from that moment as his own property, and uses all proper methods for the securing the full possession of it, so does God: "he sets apart him that is godly for himself:" he gives "his angels charge over him," and "*avouches*" him from that day to be "his purchased possession." He "*avouches*" it, I say, and makes it manifest both to the man himself and to the world around him. To the man himself he gives "a Spirit of adoption, enabling him to cry, Abba, Father," and to ascertain, by "the witness of that Spirit, that he is a child of God[o]." To the world around him also he makes it manifest, by enabling him to "walk as Christ walked," and "to shine as a light in the midst of a dark benighted world." Instantly does the change in him become apparent, so that his friends and neighbours cannot but confess that he is a new creature: and, though some will ascribe the change to one thing, and some to another, they are constrained to acknowledge, that his new mode of life is such as they cannot attain to, and such as approves itself to be the very work of God himself.]

2. To bestow on us blessings worthy of that relation—

[The first thing which the child of God desires, is *holiness:* and behold, as soon as ever he embraces the Christian covenant, God engages to *make* him holy, and to *enable him* "to keep all his commandments." This is a peculiar point of difference between the Jewish covenant and ours, as we have already observed; and it is that which is our greatest encouragement under the consciousness we feel of our own weakness. God

[o] Rom. viii. 15, 16.

"will put his Spirit within us, and *cause us* to walk in his statutes, &c.[d]" This is actually a part of HIS *covenant* engagements; and must be esteemed by us as our security for the enjoyment of all our other advantages.

Together with this does God undertake to give us the most exalted *honour and happiness*: "he will make us high above all people in praise, and in name, and in honour." "Behold," says the Apostle, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called THE SONS OF GOD!" Yes, he "calls us not servants, but friends," yea, "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." For us has he prepared crowns and kingdoms, that we may "sit with him on his throne," and be partakers of his glory for ever and ever. This, and infinitely more than language can express, has "God prepared for them that love him," and that embrace "his covenant of life and peace:" and he pledges his truth and faithfulness for the performance of his word.

O Christian, what advantages are these! what tongue can ever utter them; what imagination can ever conceive of them aright! Know however, that, unspeakable as they are, they are all thy rightful portion, thine everlasting inheritance.]

APPLICATION—

Twice is the expression used, "*this day*;" "*this day* thou hast avouched;" and "*this day* God has avouched, &c." Permit me then to ask, *Have you ever known* such a day as this, a day wherein you have solemnly surrendered yourselves to God as his redeemed people, with a full determination to serve him with your whole hearts; and a day wherein he has "manifested himself to you as he does not unto the world," and "sealed you with the Holy Spirit of promise, as the earnest of your inheritance?"

To those who have known such a day:

[Perhaps you were brought to it through many and severe afflictions[e]; but have you ever regretted for a moment the means by which such a blessed end has been accomplished? We say then, Let not the remembrance of that day escape from your minds. You cannot but recollect what a solemn transaction it was between God and your own souls; what shame you felt that ever you had alienated yourselves from him, what gratitude to him for his gracious acceptance of you, what a determination to live entirely to his glory, and what a persuasion that you could never be base enough to forget the

[d] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. [e] Zech. xiii. 9. Ezek. xx. 37.

engagements of that day. But do you not find that the good impressions have been greatly weakened, and that, whilst the ardour of your will and affections has cooled, little remains except the convictions of your judgment? Ah! beware of "leaving your first love," or of resting satisfied with past experiences. Know that it is not on any one day that these transactions must be realized, but every day of your lives. You should be again and again renewing your vows unto the Lord, and be daily occupied in fulfilling them. Look to it then, that neither the cares of the world, nor the deceitfulness of riches, nor the lusts of the flesh, nor the fear of man, nor any other thing, "choke the good seed within you, or prevent your bringing forth fruit unto perfection."]

To those who wish for such a day,

[(For we trust that such there are amongst us, who yet cannot speak of such a day as past,) we would earnestly suggest some necessary cautions.

Delay not thus to give yourselves up to God: but be particularly on your guard not to do it in a legal, self-righteous, self-dependent spirit. There are two mistakes which are very generally made, which yet are of most fatal consequence: the *first* is, that our covenant-engagements relate only to the performance of our duties; whereas they relate primarily to our acceptance of God as our reconciled God in Christ Jesus: and the *second* is, that we are to found all our hopes of covenant advantages on our own obedience; whereas we should regard them, not as purchased by us, but as bestowed on us in the covenant, and as secured to us in Christ Jesus. Happy would it be, if this matter were more clearly understood: it lies at the very root of all our comfort, and of all our stability: till we see all our holiness secured to us as well as required of us, we shall never rely as we ought on the promises of God, or give to him the glory due unto his name. See how the covenant is expressed by an inspired prophet: not only does it say, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God," but, to secure their part of the covenant as well as God's, God promises "not to turn away from them, or to suffer them to turn away from him[f]." Thus is "the covenant ordered in all things, and therefore sure:" but it is sure to those only who lay hold on it with a just apprehension of its nature, and a simple dependence on its provisions.]

Those, who have no idea of any such day,

[May probably be found amongst us. There are some who seem to take credit to themselves for never having made any profession of religion at all. But can they suppose that this is

[f] Jer. xxxii. 38—41.

any excuse for their irreligion, or that it invalidates their obligation to serve the Lord? See the solemn injunction that precedes the text[g]: can they make that void? See what is the prophet's description of things under the gospel dispensation[h]: there not only are the Lord's people represented as encouraging one another to covenant thus with God, but the state of their minds is accurately delineated, and the whole mode of their proceeding described. Be it known then that this is the duty of every one amongst us. If we would have God for our portion in a better world, we must accept him now: and, if we would be his people in a better world, we must give ourselves up to him now. To make excuses is vain. This duty is paramount to every other: and therefore we call upon all of you *this day* to "avouch God for your God," that he, in the day of judgment, may acknowledge you as his redeemed people.]

[g] ver. 16. [h] Jer. l. 4, 5.

## CCXIX.

### THE EXTENT AND EXCELLENCY OF THE MORAL LAW.

Deut. xxvii. 26. *Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them: And all the people shall say, Amen.*

THE law here spoken of is the moral law[a]. This every person is bound to keep in its utmost extent. The curse of God is denounced against every violation of it. This sanction, tremendous as it is, should be universally approved. Hence God commanded his people to express their approbation of it. "Amen" in Scripture signifies an affirmation[b], or a wish[c]. The adding of "Amen" to the doctrine of the text implies,

I. An assent to its truth—

The doctrine is, that the law of God curses us for one offence. This is often, through ignorance of the Scriptures, denied; but it may be established by a cloud of witnesses.

[Death is declared to be the necessary fruit of sin[d]. *Every* deviation from the line of duty subjects us to God's wrath[e]. An idle *word* is sufficient to condemn us[f]. The most secret

[a] Several particulars of the moral law are enumerated from ver. 15 to the end; and here it is mentioned summarily, as comprehending the whole. [b] John iii. 3. [c] Matt. vi. 13.
[d] Jam. i. 15. [e] Rom. i. 18. [f] Matt. xii. 36.

*thought* is punishable by our Judge[g]. *Omissions* of duty will entail on us the same judgments[h]. A violation of the law in one point ensures condemnation *as truly*, though not *as severely*, as a rejection of the whole[i]. One single transgression brought misery on the whole world[k]; and this was agreeable to the terms of the Adamic covenant[l]. St. Paul speaks of this penalty as still in force[m]. He even cites the very words of the text in proof of the doctrine which we deduce from them[n]. Hence the law is called "a ministration of death."]

None, however, will cordially assent to the truth of this doctrine till they see ground for,

II. A confession of its reasonableness—

The law, both in its extent and sanctions, is highly reasonable[o]. That one sin may reasonably subject us to condemnation appears,

From analogy—

[Offences in civil society are rated according to the dignity of the person against whom they are committed[p]. Now sin is committed against an infinitely great and good God. Hence it contracts an inexpressible malignity. Moreover *one act* of treason is punished with death. Nor is this judged unreasonable in human governments. Why then may not the death of the soul be annexed to every instance of rebellion against God[q]?]

From the nature of sin—

[Sin *dishonours God, takes part with Satan*, and *unfits for heaven*. Are these such light evils, that they not only *may*, but

[g] Eccl. xii. 14. [h] Matt. xxv. 30. [i] Jam. ii. 10.
[k] Rom. v. 12, 18, 19. [l] Gen. ii. 17.
[m] Rom. vi. 23. It is not said that death is the wages of *much* or *heinous* sin, but of sin, i.e. of *any* and *every* sin.
[n] Gal. iii. 10.
[o] We would not be understood to make the doctrine depend on its reasonableness, and much less on *our statement* of its reasonableness: we only wish to vindicate it from the objections which *unhumbled* reason would bring against it. If we were not able to urge one reason in its defence, it were quite sufficient to say, 'God has revealed it, and therefore it must be reasonable;' for nothing can be unreasonable which proceeds from him.
[p] Should we strike an inferior, an equal, a superior, a benefactor, a parent, a sovereign, the offence would proportionably rise; so that, what in one case might be expiated by a small fine, in another would be counted worthy of death.
[q] Is not God's majesty to be regarded as well as man's? and his government to be supported as well as man's?

*must* be overlooked? Is God forced to honour those who dishonour him? Has not He as much right to be our enemy, as we have to be his? When he sees us destitute of any love to him, is he bound to renew our hearts that we may be capable of enjoying him? Is he *unjust* if he leave us to eat the fruit of our own way[r]?

But an extorted confession of its reasonableness is not sufficient—

God requires of us further,

III. An acknowledgment of its excellency—

The law thus sanctioned is truly excellent: any other would have been *less worthy of the great Lawgiver*—

[Had it required less than perfect obedience, or had the penalty of transgressing it been no more than a temporary punishment, neither his holiness nor his justice had been so conspicuous.]

Any other would have been *more ruinous to man*—

[A permission to violate that law in ever so small a degree would have been a licence to make ourselves miserable. Had death been annexed to *many* transgressions, and not to *one*, we should have been at a loss to know our state. We should have been with more difficulty drawn from seeking righteousness by our obedience to the law. We should have seen less evil in transgressing it. We should have been less anxious to obtain an interest in Christ. Thus, though mercy is provided, we should have been less likely to obtain it, or to secure its continuance.]

Any other would have been *less honourable to Christ*—

[He would have endured less suffering for us. His inter-

[r] Is it unreasonable that God should vindicate his own honour? Are *we* at liberty to insult him, and *he* not to punish us? *May* we be his enemies, and *must* he treat us as friends? When our first parents sinned, was God *obliged* to remedy the evil they had brought upon themselves? Might he not have left *them*, as he had already left *the fallen angels?* Was there any *necessity* that God should assume the human nature, and offer himself a sacrifice for his creatures' sin? If so, they, even after their fall, might have disdained to ask for heaven as *a gift;* they might still have demanded it as a debt. Then God is under a law, and we are free from a law; we are free to live as we please; and he is under a necessity to save us at all events. The absurdity of such positions is obvious.

position for us had been less needed; it would have discovered far less love. The obligations conferred by it would have been comparatively small. He would have been less honoured by all. Some would have been saved without his aid. Many would, to eternity, have ascribed the honour of their salvation to themselves.]

In this view "the ministration of death was glorious[s]"—

Such a discovery of its excellency will immediately produce,

IV. An approbation of it with respect to our own particular case—

A person taught of God will cordially approve of this law: he will love it as the means of humbling him in the dust—

[It discovers to him, as in a glass, his manifold transgressions. It convinces him of his desert of punishment. It shews him the impossibility of making reparation to God. It constrains him to cry, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" And thus it brings him to the state he most desires[t].]

He will delight in it as endearing Christ to his soul—

[The depth of his disorder makes him value the Physician. He sees his need of one to "bear the iniquity of his holy things[u]." He finds that Christ is set forth for this very purpose[x]. Hence he rejoices in Christ as his Almighty Saviour.]

Such an approbation of it was expressed by Jeremiah[y]. St. Paul also highly commends it in this view[z]; and every true Christian can adopt his words[a].

APPLICATION—

[Let us study this law as a covenant. Let us acknowledge our condemnation by it. Let it serve as a "schoolmaster to bring us to Christ[b]." Let that declaration be the ground of our hope[c].]

[s] 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9, 10, 11. [t] Luke xviii. 13. [u] Exod. xxviii. 38.
[x] Rom. x. 4. [y] Jer. xi. 3, 5. [z] Rom. vii. 12.
[a] Rom. vii. 22. [b] Gal. iii. 24. [c] Gal. iii. 13.

## CCXX.

### THE DUTY OF FEARING GOD.

Deut. xxviii. 58, 59. *If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear that glorious and fearful name, The Lord thy God; then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful.*

WE admire the fidelity of Moses, who "declared to Israel the whole counsel of God," "not withholding from them any thing whereby they might be profited." To deliver such warnings as are contained in this chapter, must have been inexpressibly painful to him. But he had no alternative, unless indeed he would subject himself to all the curses here denounced; and involve himself, as well as them, in all the consequences of his unfaithfulness and concealment. Brethren, the same necessity lies on us also: we must, at the peril of our souls, deliver all that God has commissioned us to declare: and, if we fail to do so, not only will "you perish in your iniquities, but your blood will be required at our hands[a]." Bear with me, then, I pray you, whilst with becoming fidelity I set before you,

I. What God requires of us—

God is indeed a great and glorious Being, "a God of terrible majesty[b]," "before whom the pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at his reproof[c]." And he requires that "we fear his glorious and fearful name." He requires that we regard him,

1. With reverential awe—

[Truly "he is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." When he came down upon Mount Sinai in the presence of all Israel, not a soul except Moses was suffered to approach him: and, if even a beast had touched the mountain, it must immediately be slain. So great was the terror which his presence inspired, that even "Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake[d]." And he is still the same God, though he do not manifest himself in the same way. Yes, under the New Testament, as well

[a] Ezek. xxxiii. 8. [b] Job xxxvii. 22.
[c] Job xxvi. 11. [d] Heb. xii. 20, 21.

as the Old, we are taught to bear this in mind, that "our God is a consuming fire, and never to be approached but with reverence and godly fear[e]."]

2. With obediential love—

[This is the point more especially noticed in the passage before us: and wherever the fear of God is, it must of necessity manifest itself in this way. There will be a real desire to please God; and a full conviction, that every command of his is "holy, and just, and good." Nothing will be deemed "an hard saying;" nothing be accounted "grievous." We shall not wish for any limit to our obedience; but shall regard the entire surrender of our souls to him as a reasonable service. This is the conclusion to which Solomon came, after carefully weighing the whole matter: "Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty (and end, and happiness) of man[f]."]

3. With undivided attachment—

[God will not endure a rival in our affections. He must have the whole heart: and the person who shall dare to offer him "a divided heart, shall surely be found guilty before him[g]." It is true, we do not give way to gross idolatry, like those to whom our text was addressed: but if we look into "the chambers of imagery" within us, we shall find as many idols as ever were worshipped in the time of Israel's most determined apostasy[h]. And "God is still, as he ever was, a jealous God," that "will not have his glory given to another:" yea, "his very name is, Jealous[i]." Know, then, that you must not "set your affections on any thing here below," but have them all concentrated on him, fearing nothing, desiring nothing, confiding in nothing, in comparison of him. Father, mother, wife and children, houses and lands, yea, and our own life also, must all be subordinated to him, and sacrificed for him, whensoever our duty to him shall call for it. We must love and serve him, him supremely, him only, him exclusively.]

Hear, then, I entreat you,

II. What we must expect at his hands, if we comply not with his requisition—

The Lord made the plagues of his people truly wonderful. Never since the world began was any nation visited with such heavy judgments as they[k], nor will there ever be the like again, even to the end

[e] Heb. xii. 28, 29. [f] Eccl. xii. 13. [g] Hos. x. 2.
[h] Ezek. viii. 9—12. [i] Exod. xxxiv. 14. [k] Lam. i. 12.

of time[l]. They are, and were designed to be, "a sign unto us[m]." Truly, then, if we fear not God, "our plagues also shall be wonderful." They shall be wonderful,

1. Here—

[Look at the different nations of the world, and see what tormentors they are to each other. Behold also the famines, pestilences, earthquakes, which God sends at different times, as "avengers of his quarrel" with those who rebel against him. See, too, the whole frame of society, whether in larger bodies or in private families; and behold what feuds obtain amongst them, insomuch that there is scarcely a body to be found, the members of which are not arrayed more or less in mutual hostility, and contributing to each other's disquiet. Take all the different individuals of mankind; there is scarcely one who has attained the age of manhood, or, at all events, been long settled in the world, without having, in some respect or other, his very life embittered to him, so that at times, if there had been no future state of existence, he would have almost wished for death as a release from his troubles. Mark the tempers which agitate men's minds, and the curse which there is even upon their blessings, insomuch that those who most abound in this world's goods are not unfrequently the most miserable of mankind. Thus, even in this world, does God fulfil his threatening in our text, and "make our plagues wonderful."]

2. Hereafter—

[Who can conceive a soul, at its first entrance into the invisible world, beholding all at once the face of an angry and avenging God? How does it start back from him, and cry to rocks and mountains to hide it from his presence! Who can conceive that soul hearing from its Judge those terrific words, "Depart, accursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels?" Who can conceive hell opening for its reception, and the man cast, body and soul, "into the lake of fire and brimstone," "where the worm of an accusing conscience never dieth, and the fire is never quenched?" Who can conceive the soul's retrospect of the mercies it has despised, and the opportunities it has for ever lost? and, above all, who can conceive its prospects of eternity, as the duration of all the misery to which it is consigned? Say, Beloved, whether *then* the plagues will not be wonderful? *Now* they may be laughed at and despised: but when this cup of God's indignation shall be put into the sinner's hands, and he is left to drink it to the

[l] Mark xiii. 19. [m] ver. 46.

very dregs, there will be an end of all his laughter, and to all eternity will he be occupied in "weeping and wailing and gnashing his teeth."]

BEHOLD, then—

["I now set life and death before you." Say, which of the two ye will choose. If ye doubt the fulfilment of God's threatenings, read the sad catalogue of woes that were denounced against the Jews, and tell me if so much as one of them has failed of its accomplishment. Indeed, my Brethren, every Jew you see is a witness for God, that His word shall be fulfilled in all its fearful extent — — — But, on the other hand, let me say, that the converse of our text is also true. Yes, if you fear and obey the Lord, your blessings also shall be wonderful. Even in this world "the peace of God's obedient people passeth all understanding," and their joy is often unspeakable and glorified. And if you could follow a believing soul into the eternal world; if you could behold it when first it is introduced into the presence of its God and Saviour; if you could see it, whilst the Judge of quick and dead is pronouncing that laudatory sentence, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord;" if, further, you could behold it in the very bosom of its God, invested with a happiness which can never be interrupted, and a glory that shall never end; then you would say that its blessedness is truly wonderful. Why, then, brethren, should you not seek this bliss? Why will you cast it all away, and treasure up for yourselves the sad alternative, even the misery that shall endure for evermore? I pray you, be wise in time; and consider your latter end, ere it be too late! And I pray God, that what has been spoken may now be so impressed upon your minds, that that which took place in Jerusalem may never be realized in you: "She remembered not her latter end; therefore she came down wonderfully[n]."]

[n] Lam. i. 9.

## CCXXI.

### MEN'S BLINDNESS IN SPIRITUAL THINGS.

Deut. xxix. 4. *The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.*

THERE is nothing more comforting to a minister, than to see "the word of the Lord running and glorified" amongst the people of his charge. On the other hand, it is extremely painful to him to find that his labours have been in a great measure in vain.

Yet such are the reflections which many a faithful minister is led to make, after an attentive survey of his ministrations. The Prophet Isaiah felt occasion to lament this, in his day; saying, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed[a]?" Our blessed Lord had but too much reason to make a similar complaint respecting the issue of his labours also[b]. Thus we find Moses, after the most indefatigable exertions for the space of forty years, constrained to adopt towards the Jewish people the language of my text; "The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day." Would to God that there were not grounds, also, for similar complaint amongst you, my Brethren! But Christian fidelity compels me to declare, that to a most lamentable extent these words are verified in this place: and, of course, I must open to you the complaint,

I. As uttered by Moses against the people of his charge—

They had "*seen*" with their bodily eyes all the wonders that had been wrought for them in Egypt and the wilderness — — — But they had no spiritual perception of them. They understood not,

1. The true character of that dispensation—

[They viewed the various occurrences as so many separate and detached events; and had no idea of their figurative import, no conception of them as shadows of good things to come. They saw not that more wonderful redemption which was typically exhibited to their view. The paschal lamb led them not to the contemplation of their Messiah, and of the deliverance which he should effect through the shedding, and the sprinkling, of his most precious blood. Their subsistence by manna, and by water from the rock, served not to shew them what it was to live by faith on the Son of God, or to experience in their souls the refreshing communications of the Spirit of God. And though they had already seen a portion given to three of their tribes, yet did they not contemplate the issue of a believer's warfare in the possession of the heavenly Canaan. As for the Law that had been given them, whether the moral or ceremonial law, they knew not the true

[a] Isai. liii. 1. [b] John xii. 37, 38.

intent of either: they had no idea of the one as shutting them up to the only possible way of salvation through faith in their Messiah, or of the other as shadowing forth that Messiah in all his offices. In fact, they had no spiritual discernment of any of these things, but were uninstructed and unedified by all that they had seen and heard[c].]

2. The obligations which it entailed upon them—

[The very first and most obvious effect of all these wonders should have been, to bring them to the knowledge of Jehovah as the only true God, and to make them his faithful worshippers and adherents to the latest hour of their lives. Yet, behold! they had not been delivered from Egypt three months, before they made and worshipped the golden calf: yea, and all the way through the wilderness they "took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of their god Remphan, figures which they made as objects of their worship[d]," in preference to Jehovah, whom thus they provoked to jealousy, till he was constrained to pour forth his wrath upon them to their destruction. It might well be expected, too, that they would yield up themselves to God in a willing obedience to his Law, and live altogether devoted to his service. But they were "a rebellious and stiff-necked people," from first to last. The mercies of God could not win them to obedience, nor his judgments deter them from disobedience. The present and future gratification of their senses was all that they desired: and, if only they had their enjoyments, they cared not whether God were glorified or not.

We say not that this was the character of all that people: but when we recollect, that of that whole nation two only, of all the *men* that came out of Egypt, were suffered to enter into Canaan, we cannot but fear that the exceptions were very few, and the great mass of the people were of the very description represented in our text.]

Humiliating as this complaint is, we must also consider it,

II. As applicable to ourselves at this day—

Infinitely greater have our advantages been than those enjoyed by the Jewish people. They had the shadow only, but we the substance. The whole of redemption has been set before us: yet we, for the most part, have but a very faint and inadequate conception of it. By the great mass of nominal Christians,

[c] All these hints admit of profitable enlargement.

[d] Acts vii. 41—43.

1. The nature of the Gospel is very indistinctly seen—

[A mere general notion of salvation by Christ may be entertained: but of the *grace* of the Gospel, its freeness, its fulness, its suitableness, how little is seen! and how far are we from "comprehending the length and breadth, and depth and height of the love of Christ" contained in it! How few amongst us have any just views of "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and of all the divine perfections, as united, and harmonizing, and glorified, in this stupendous mystery! The various offices of the sacred Three, all sustained and executed for us, how little of *them* is known! Indeed, indeed, the generality of those who call themselves Christians are as dark with respect to the excellency and glory of the Gospel, as the Jews themselves were of the scope and character of their Law.]

2. The effects of it are very partially experienced—

[What might we expect from those who have been redeemed by the blood of God's only dear Son, and renewed in their souls by the operation of his blessed Spirit? Should we not be full of admiring and adoring thoughts of God? Should we not be wrapt, even to the third heaven, in love to Christ? Should we not be "yielding up both our bodies and our souls to God, as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to him as our reasonable service?" And to what an extent should we not be sanctified, in all our tempers, dispositions, and actions, if we were duly influenced by the principles of the Gospel! In a word, if we felt as we ought, methinks our every feeling would be love, and our every word be praise.

But look at the great majority of those to whom the Gospel has been ministered, and say whether any measure of these effects be visible upon them? Alas! it is as true of us as of the Jews, that "God has not given us an heart to perceive, or eyes to see, or ears to hear, unto this day."]

Let me then ADDRESS myself,

1. To those who are altogether blind—

[Perhaps you will be disposed to say, "If God has not given me this discernment, the fault is not mine." But this is a fatal error: for the fault is altogether yours. Had you sought of God the illuminating influences of his Spirit, he would have opened your blind eyes, and unstopped your deaf ears, and renewed you in the spirit of your mind: no earthly parent would so readily bestow bread on his famished child, as God would have given to you his Holy Spirit in answer to your prayers. If, then, you "perish for lack of knowledge,"

it must be ascribed to your own obstinate neglect of those means which God has appointed for the attainment of spiritual instruction.]

2. To those who think they see—

[Multitudes, like the Pharisees of old, are ready to ask with confidence, "Are we blind also?" To these we reply, Let your lives declare: let the fruit determine the quality of the tree. Yes, brethren, "if you were indeed blind, you would comparatively have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth[o]." Your conceit and self-sufficiency render your blindness tenfold more odious, more incurable, and more fatal — — —]

3. To those whose eyes God has opened—

[Verily, the mercy vouchsafed to you is beyond measure or conception great. You doubtless feel what a blessing the gift of reason is, which so elevates you above the beasts: but far richer is the gift of spiritual discernment, which enables you to see "the things of the Spirit," and elevates you above your fellow-men, even above the wisest and greatest of the human race. Compare the Apostles with the philosophers of Greece and Rome; mark, not merely their intellectual powers, but their moral habits and their spiritual attainments; then will you have some conception of the mercies vouchsafed to you, and will appreciate, in some poor measure, the obligations conferred upon you.]

[o] John ix. 40, 41.

## CCXXII.

### DANGER OF CARNAL SECURITY.

Deut. xxix. 19, 20. *And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.*

GOD has declared that he "desireth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live:" and this is abundantly evident from the forbearance which he exercises towards sinners, and from the means he has used for their restoration to his favour. When he brought the

Israelites out of Egypt, he entered into covenant with them on Mount Horeb: and when that whole generation had perished in consequence of their violations of his covenant, he was graciously pleased to renew the covenant with their children in the land of Moab: and the reason he gives for that condescending kindness is, lest they should presumptuously sin, and miserably perish, after the example of their fathers[a].

In the words which we have just read, he intimates,

I. The astonishing delusion of sinners—

That the greatest part of mankind are walking after the imaginations of their own hearts, is evident; and that God denounces his vengeance against them, is equally evident: yet on every side we behold,

1. Their fearlessness—

[God speaks to them in the plainest terms, that "the soul that sinneth shall die," and that "the wicked shall be turned into hell, even all the people that forget God." They themselves too cannot but acknowledge, that "the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Yet they hear the denunciations of God's wrath with perfect indifference: they account them not worth the smallest consideration: yea, to use the expressive language of the Psalmist, "they puff at them[b]." 'What though they do "set at nought God's law, and walk rather after the imagination of their own hearts?" What though they do "add drunkenness to thirst," and "draw out sin as a cart-rope[c]," adding fresh materials continually, and drawing it out without any intermission to an indefinite length, will God regard such trifling matters? No: He does not see them, or deem them worthy of his notice[d]. He does indeed threaten to punish these things; but he will never execute his threatenings.' If any menace their temporal welfare, they are open enough to the impressions of fear, and anxious enough to escape the danger: but if God threaten them with his everlasting displeasure, they regard it as an empty sound. Thus do they cast off all fear of God, and treat both him and his word with the utmost contempt[e].]

2. Their self-complacency—

[They can see no evil in sin: they are sensible that they

[a] See ver. 1, 15, 18—20. [b] Ps. x. 5. [c] Isai. v. 18.
[d] Ps. x. 11. and Job xxii. 13, 14. [e] Ps. x. 13.

do not conform to God's law; (nor indeed have they any wish to do so;) but yet, though their actions are not correct, their hearts are good: they mean no harm: they do as they would be done by; and that, in their estimation, comprehends all that is required of them. It is truly astonishing to see how, in the midst of all their iniquities, men will "*bless themselves in their hearts*," as much as if there were nothing amiss in their conduct. They quite resent the idea of being sinners, and of deserving God's wrath and indignation: they conceive that they are very good sort of people (as the expression is), and deserving of God's favour. Thus it was with the Jews of old; "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these[f]:" they thought that no expressions were too strong to characterize their goodness. And thus do sinners in this day boast of their goodness: yea, not only the moral and sober do so, but even the drunken, the sensual, the profane: all are ready to think themselves as good as they need to be, and to answer, like the Youth in the Gospel, "What lack I yet?" So blinded are they by Satan, and hardened through the deceitfulness of their own hearts!]

3. Their confidence—

[They entertain no doubts or fears: they think that all go to heaven, and that they must of necessity be happy when they die. "I shall have peace," is the bold assertion of every one amongst them; nor will they suffer the safety of their state to be once questioned. On some occasions perhaps a suspicion arises in their minds that it is not quite so well with them as they imagine; but in general they go on as assured of happiness as if all the promises of the Gospel were on their side. Nor is this only in the thoughtlessness of youth: their confidence increases with their age: and even in death they frequently retain it to such a degree as to feel no fear of death: and this delusion of theirs is considered by the survivors as an evidence of their final acceptance. Well does the prophet say of them, "A deceived heart hath turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver their souls, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"]

But God views them with other eyes, and denounces,

II. Their awful doom—

The terms in which this is declared are sufficient to alarm the most careless sinner. The wrath of God is here denounced against him. This must be his portion: and this doom is,

[f] Jer. vii. 4.

1. Infallibly certain—

[Sinners imagine that God cannot inflict punishment: they suppose that if not inconsistent with his justice, it would at least be contrary to his acknowledged goodness and benignity. They think that, when the time comes, he will relent, and spare them. But, in our text, he meets that error, and declares, "The Lord will not spare him." "I have spared him long enough," the Lord will say: "I bore with all his wickedness for many years:" "I waited long to be gracious to him:" "I called to him, but he would not hear; I entreated him, but he refused to hearken: and therefore he now may call, and I will not hear; I will even laugh at his calamity, and mock when his fear is come." Now God would "repent him of the evil which he has thought to bring" on any sinner: but how inflexible he will be in that day, the prophet has abundantly declared[s]. The sinner may "knock at the door which is shut against him, saying, Lord, Lord, open to me: but I will say, Depart from me, I never knew thee, thou worker of iniquity."]

2. Inexpressibly severe—

[What must it be to have "the anger and the jealousy of Almighty God" incensed, and so incensed, as to be, as it were, "smoking against us?" But, to form a just idea of the sinner's doom, we must take all the most terrific passages of the word of God, and contemplate all the images contained in them, and then conceive of all of them combined to fill up the measure of his misery. Oh, if we think of "that lake that burneth with fire and brimstone," "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched," where there is nothing but "weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," and "the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever," what an idea does it all give us of the judgments that await the impenitent transgressor! Yet these, yea and "*all* the curses that are written in the sacred volume" from one end of it even to the other, shall come upon him, and shall "*lie* and abide upon him for ever and ever." Once, if he had sought for mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ, his name might have been "written in the book of life;" but now "God will blot out his name from under heaven," and it shall be found registered only with those of the devil and his angels.

We are well aware that these truths are unwelcome to the generality of men: but it is infinitely better to contemplate them *in time*, than to be left to experience them *in eternity*.]

Let us LEARN then from this subject,

1. To compassionate the ungodly world—

[s] Ezek. viii. 18. and xxiv. 14.

[Were we to see men in danger of perishing in the sea, the most hardened amongst us would be moved to compassion: why then do we not pity those who are ready every moment to sink into the flames of hell? That they themselves are not alarmed is rather the reason why *we* should feel the more alarmed; because their foot will infallibly "slide in due time," and "the wrath of God will come upon them to the uttermost." Let "our eyes then run down with tears for them," and "our head be a fountain of tears to weep for them day and night." Let our efforts too be exerted to awaken them to a timely care of their own souls.]

2. To be on our guard against being influenced by their advice—

[Those who see not their own danger will be equally secure respecting *us*[h], and will endeavour to lull *us* asleep by their confident assertions. But, if their presumption will not benefit themselves, it will assuredly not benefit us. The antediluvian world, and the inhabitants of Sodom, despised the warnings given them, and accounted them as idle tales: but the threatened judgments came at last, and the deceivers and deceived perished in one indiscriminate mass. So will it be at the end of the world[i]. Every tittle of God's word shall be fulfilled; and therefore let those who would draw you back to the world be disregarded by you[k]. "Let God be true, but every man a liar."]

3. To be thankful if God has made us to differ from them—

[What reason had Noah and Lot to be thankful that they were enabled to believe the divine testimony! And truly, if we are enabled to come forth from an ungodly world, and to enter into the true Ark, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have no less reason to be thankful than they. It is no less the fruit of God's sovereign grace, than was the mercy vouchsafed to them. Let us then be increasingly watchful against presumptuous confidence, and all the delusions of our own hearts; and, in an unreserved attention to all God's commands, let us "keep ourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."]

[h] Ezek. xiii. 22. [i] 2 Pet. ii. 4—9. [k] Eph. v. 6.

## CCXXIII.

### SECRET THINGS BELONG TO GOD.

Deut. xxix. 29. *The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this Law.*

NEVER were mercies granted to any people, so rich as those which were vouchsafed to Israel: nor were there ever judgments so signally, through successive ages, inflicted on any other nation, as on them. And all this was in accordance with prophecy, even with the prophecies which Moses himself delivered to them previous to their entrance into Canaan. All was foreseen by God; and was foretold also, with sufficient clearness, if they would but learn to act in obedience to the divine warnings. To inquire into the reasons of God's dealings with them, and especially to sit in judgment upon God as though he dealt hardly with them, would be to no purpose. The reasons of his determinations were hid in his own bosom: and his determinations themselves were made known to them for their benefit: and God expected that they should make a suitable improvement of all the information which he had given them. This seems to be the general import of our text; from whence I shall take occasion to shew,

I. The proper limit for our inquiries into the things of God—

God has been pleased to reveal much to us respecting his nature, his dispensations, his purposes: but there is infinitely more which he has not seen fit to communicate; and which, if communicated, we should be no more able to comprehend, than a child could comprehend the deepest discoveries of philosophy. Even what we do know, we know only in part: in fact, our knowledge of every thing is so superficial, that it scarcely deserves to be called knowledge: and, therefore, in relation to every thing the utmost possible diffidence becomes us. For, after all, what know we,

1. Of God's nature?

[We are informed that "He is a Spirit;" that he is, from all eternity, a self-existent Being: that "the heaven of heavens cannot contain him." But what idea have we of a Spirit? What notion can we form of eternity and omnipresence? The greatest philosopher in the universe has not a whit more adequate conceptions of these things, than a little infant. Nor do

we, in reality, know any thing more of the *moral* perfections of the Deity, than we do of those which we call natural. We speak of his holiness, and justice, and mercy, and truth: but our knowledge of these things is altogether negative: we merely know that he is not unholy, or unjust, or unmerciful, or untrue; and that is all.

And what shall I say to his subsistence in Three Persons, each possessing all the attributes of Deity, whilst yet there is but ONE GOD? We know that the Father is spoken of as the Fountain from whence all proceeds; that the Son also is spoken of as executing all which the Father had ordained for the redemption of the world; and that the Holy Ghost also is spoken of as applying to the sons of men all that the Son has purchased, or the Father ordained. But of these things we know nothing beyond what God has told us in his word: and if we attempt to descant upon them, "we only darken counsel by words without knowledge." In the contemplation of such mysteries, it becomes us to bear in mind the pointed interrogations of Zophar; "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? it is high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know[a]?"]

2. Of his dispensations?

[We know that God ordereth every thing both in heaven and earth; and that without him "not a sparrow falls to the ground," nor "an hair from the head of one of his servants." But will any one inform us *how* God overrules the minds of voluntary agents, so as infallibly to accomplish his own will and yet not participate in the evils which they commit? Our blessed Lord was put to death "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God:" and yet, throughout the whole of that scene, the agents followed altogether the dictates of their own hearts, and "with wicked hands crucified and slew him." And will any one inform us how this was done? And if we know so little of God's *Providence*, who shall declare to us the wonders of his *Grace?* Will any one tell us *why* the world was left four thousand years before the Saviour was sent to redeem it? or *why* Abraham was chosen in preference to all other persons upon earth, that the Saviour should descend from him, and that it should be in the line of Isaac and Jacob, rather than through the line of Ishmael and Esau? Will any one tell us *how* the Spirit of God acts upon the souls of some, to quicken, sanctify, and save them; whilst others never experience these operations; or experience his influence only in such a degree as ultimately to aggravate their eternal condemnation? Let any one only tell us how mind operates upon

[a] Job xi. 7, 8.

matter in any one motion of his own body: and if he cannot tell this, how shall he presume to judge of God, "whose ways are in the great deep, and his paths past finding out?"]

3. Of his purposes?

[We are assured that "God doeth every thing according to the counsel of his own will; and that none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" But who has searched the records of heaven, so as to tell us what shall come to pass, either in reference to nations, or to any solitary individual? Our blessed Lord repeatedly checked all presumptuous inquiries into these things. When his disciples asked him, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? he answered, It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power[b]." And when Peter inquired of him respecting John, "Lord, what shall this man do? our Lord replied, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?"

In truth, we know nothing of God; nothing of what he *is*, or *does*, or *will do*, any further than he has been pleased to reveal himself to us: and all our inquiries respecting him should issue in that profound adoring exclamation, "O the depth[c]!" Instead of complaining that our knowledge is so circumscribed, we should be thankful that it extends so far: for if there be little communicated to gratify a foolish curiosity, there is every thing made known to us that can conduce to our present and eternal welfare.]

This idea points out to us,

II. The proper use to be made of all the knowledge we obtain—

Every thing that God has revealed is intended to have a practical effect: and every thing contained in Holy Writ has a direct tendency to convey some spiritual benefit to our souls. Let us briefly trace this in what is revealed concerning,

1. God and his perfections—

[All that is spoken in Scripture upon this sublime subject, tends to fill us with holy fear, and love, and confidence; and to bring us to God, as his obedient subjects and servants———]

2. Christ and his offices—

[There is no way to the Father but through the Son. When, therefore, we read of him as the Prophet, Priest, and

[b] Acts i. 6, 7. [c] Rom. xi. 33.

King of his Church, we are of necessity taught to look to him for the illumination of our minds, the pardon of our sins, the subjugation of all our spiritual enemies. We are taught to "live altogether by faith in him, who has loved us, and given himself for us" — — —]

3. The Holy Spirit, and his operations—

[If we can come to God only *through* the Son, so neither have we any access to him but *by* the Spirit[d]. Hence, in desiring his gracious influences, we should seek to have the whole work of grace wrought within us, and to be "transformed into the divine image," and be "made meet for our eternal inheritance" — — —]

4. The Gospel, with all its promises and precepts—

[Nothing of this is to be contemplated as a mere matter of speculation; but the whole Gospel is to be embraced *as a remedy*, as a remedy suited to our wants and sufficient for our necessities. Every promise of it is to be embraced as a ground of hope; and every precept in it is to be obeyed as an evidence of our faith and love — — —]

5. The realities of the eternal world—

[No one ever came from heaven or from hell to inform us what those states were, or what was the full import of those terms under which those states are displayed. Nor is it of importance to us to know more of them in this world. We already know enough to call forth into activity our hopes and our fears: and our wisdom, is so to improve our knowledge of them, as to "flee from the wrath to come," and to "lay hold on eternal life" — — —

In a word, "whatsoever is revealed belongs to us and to our children for ever, that in all succeeding ages we should do all the words of God's Law," and approve ourselves to him as a faithful and obedient people.]

Hence, then, we may see—

1. What answer we should make to the proud objector—

[Persons will sit in judgment upon God and his revealed will, as if they were capable of determining, by their own wisdom, what was fitting for him to reveal or do; and they will decide with confidence on all which they either see or hear, precisely as if they were competent to weigh in a balance all the mysteries of divine wisdom. With what impious boldness will many revile the mystery of a Trinity of Persons in the

[d] Eph. ii. 18.

Godhead; the incarnation of Christ, and his atoning sacrifice; and the influences of the Holy Spirit. But to all such proud objectors I will say, with St. Paul, "Nay but, O man! who art thou that repliest against God[e]?" Thou mistakest utterly the province of reason, if thou thinkest that she is to sit in judgment upon such mysteries as these. She is to judge whether the book which we call the Bible, be of divine inspiration: but when that is once admitted, then she must give way to faith, whose office it is to embrace all that God has revealed, and to make use of it for the ends and purposes for which he has revealed it. And if thou wilt presume to "reprove God, thou shalt surely answer for it[f]:" for "he giveth not account to man of any of his matters[g]."]

2. What direction we should give to the humble inquirer—

[There may be many things brought to your ears which are above your comprehension, and which you may find it difficult to receive. But there is a standard to which every sentiment may be referred, and a touchstone by which every doctrine may be tried. Our blessed Lord said to those who doubted the propriety of his instructions, "Search the Scriptures: for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me[h]." And the Prophet Isaiah told his hearers to bring every thing to this test: "To the Law, and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no truth in them[i]." All that is needful for you to know, is contained in God's word. Whatever agrees with that, is true: whatever is contrary to it, is false: and whatever cannot be determined by it, may well be left among those "secret things which belong to God alone."]

3. What encouragement we are to afford to the true believer—

["The secret of the Lord," we are told, "is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant[k]." Yes, this is indeed a most encouraging truth. Not that we are to suppose that God will give any new revelation to his people: we have no reason whatever to expect *that:* but he will shine upon his revealed truth, so that they shall have a perception of it which others have not. I need not tell you how much clearer any thing is discerned when the sun shines upon it; or how much more accurately it is seen when the eye is fixed more intently on it: or how things most minute or distant are rendered distinctly visible by glasses suited to our organs of

[e] Rom. ix. 20. [f] Job xl. 2. [g] Job xxxiii. 13.
[h] John v. 39. [i] Isai. viii. 20. [k] Ps. xxv. 14.

sight. Now, in all these ways will God discover his secrets to the believing soul. He will, by his Spirit, cast a flood of light upon the word; and make the soul most eager to apprehend his truth; and by the medium of faith bring that truth directly upon the tablet of the mind; and thus fulfil that promise, "All thy people shall be taught of God[l]." Yes, "the meek he will guide in judgment; the meek he will teach his way[m]."]

[l] John vi. 45. [m] Ps. xxv. 9.

## CCXXIV.

### THE RESTORATION AND CONVERSION OF THE JEWS.

Deut. xxx. 4—6. *If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: and the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers. And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.*

IN interpreting the Holy Scriptures, it is common with many to dwell almost exclusively upon the literal or historical sense of them, and to confine their meaning to the persons to whom the different parts were immediately addressed, or of whom they spake. But this limits the use of the sacred volume in such a manner, as to render it of little service to us. By supposing that it related only to other persons and other times, we get rid of its authority, destroy its power over our conscience, and learn to set aside every doctrine which we are not willing to receive, and every precept which we do not choose to practise. But there is an opposite error, against which also we ought to be on our guard. Some are so intent on the spiritual sense of Scripture, as almost entirely to overlook the literal. But the primary meaning is often as replete with instruction as any that can be affixed to the words, and incomparably more satisfactory to a well-informed mind. For instance, if we should take occasion from our text to speak of the nature and effects of true conversion,

in bringing us to God and renovating our souls, we might speak what was good and useful; but the primary sense of the passage leads us to another subject, which ought to be of equal importance in our eyes, namely, The Restoration and Conversion of the Jews.

In discoursing then on the words before us, we shall notice,

I. The events to which they relate:—

That which first demands our attention, is, The *restoration* of the Jews—

[Very much is spoken in the prophets on this subject: and though a great part of their declarations respecting it may be considered as having received their accomplishment in the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, there are some which evidently refer to a period yet future. The Prophet Ezekiel associates it with their acknowledgment of one Prince, whom he calls David[a]. But there was not any prince after the captivity to whom that name can with any propriety be applied in such a view; whereas the Lord Jesus Christ is often spoken of under that name: and therefore it is reasonable to conclude, that the restoration spoken of must take place after the establishment of Christianity in the world. Indeed so strong are the declarations of Scripture upon this subject, that an expectation of the event universally obtains throughout the Christian world. What the precise time will be, we cannot absolutely fix: but we believe that they will be gathered from all quarters of the earth, and possess again their own land, agreeably to the literal expressions of our text: and it is highly probable, that the time is not far distant. As for the objections arising from the difficulty of carrying such a measure into execution, or from the barrenness of the land of Canaan, they vanish the very moment we open the Scriptures, and see what God did for them in former times. If God has ordained it, every mountain will become a plain.]

Nearly connected with this is their *conversion* to Christianity—

[If we suppose a doubt to arise respecting the former, there exists not even a shadow of a doubt respecting this. The Apostle Paul represents it as assuredly determined in the divine counsels, and infallibly to be accomplished in due season. The people of God in every age may be regarded as one tree, of which Abraham may be considered as the root. The Jews after

[a] Ezek. xxxvii. 21—25.

a time were broken off, as fruitless branches; and the Gentiles were grafted on their stock: and, when the appointed season shall arrive, God will again engraft the Jews upon their own stock, and make both Jews and Gentiles one tree, that shall fill the whole earth. It is by this latter measure that God's designs of love and mercy to the Gentiles also shall be perfected: for the conversion of the Jews will awaken the attention of the unconverted Gentiles, and be the means of bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles[b] ———

The change that will be wrought upon them will not be merely outward, or consisting in speculative opinions; it will reach to their inmost souls; it will produce in them a circumcision of the heart, an utter abhorrence of all sin, and a fervent love to God, as their reconciled God in Christ Jesus: they will "love him," I say, "with all their heart, and with all their soul." True indeed it is that they are very far from this state of mind at present: but so were the murderers of the Lord Jesus on the day of Pentecost; and yet in one hour were converted unto God. So shall it be in the day of God's power; "a nation shall be born in a day;" "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: the Lord will hasten it in his time."]

Such being the prophetic import of the words, let us proceed to notice,

II. The reflections which they naturally suggest—

The present dispersed state of the Jews from which they are in due time to be recovered, is a most instructive subject. We cannot but see,

1. What witnesses they are for God—

[The very person who brought them out of Egypt was inspired to foretell both their present dispersion, and their future restoration. The event has come to pass; and now for nearly eighteen hundred years have this people been scattered over the face of the whole earth, and are preserved a distinct people in every place. The treatment they should meet with was most circumstantially foretold: the hardships they should undergo[c], the oppression they should endure[d], the contempt in which they should be held[e], the conviction which they themselves, in common with all mankind, should feel, that their sufferings were inflicted by God himself on account of their iniquities[f]; all, I say, was foretold; and all is come to pass: and they are

[b] Rom. xi. 12, 15, 23—29.
[c] Deut. xxviii. 53—57.
[d] Deut. xxviii. 29.
[e] Deut. xxviii. 37.
[f] Deut. xxix. 21—28.

living witnesses of the truth of God, and of the divine authority of that book which they profess to have been inspired by him. They may be even said to be witnesses also of the truth of Christianity, which is founded on the Jewish Scriptures, and is altogether the completion of them. What therefore God said to them in the days of old, may with yet augmented force be applied to them at this time, "Ye are my witnesses, that I am God[g]."]

2. What warnings they are to us—

[Who that sees the present state of the Jews, and compares it with the predictions concerning them, must not acknowledge that God abhorreth iniquity, and will surely punish it even in his most highly favoured people? Methinks the sight of a Jew should produce this reflection in every mind. The Jews, because they were descended from the loins of Abraham, and had been distinguished by God above all the nations upon earth, imagined themselves to be safe: but when they had filled up the measure of their iniquities in the murder of their Messiah, the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost. Let not Christians therefore imagine that the name and profession of Christianity will screen them from the wrath of God. The sentence of exclusion from the heavenly Canaan is gone forth against all who reject the Lord Jesus Christ; and it will assuredly be executed upon them in due time: for "how shall they escape, if they neglect so great salvation?" Our inquiry must be, not, Am I instructed in some particular tenets, or observant of some particular forms? but, Am I "circumcised in heart, so as to love the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart, and with all my soul?" This is the point to be ascertained; for "if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he will be anathema maran-atha:" he will be accursed; and God himself will for ever inflict the curse upon him.]

3. What encouragement we have to seek their welfare—

[Notwithstanding God has given so many promises respecting them, the Christian world for many hundreds of years have scarcely thought them worthy of the smallest attention. Christians have been anxious for the welfare of heathens, and have sent missionaries into every quarter of the world to instruct them: but for the Jews they have felt no interest whatever: they have left them to perish without so much as an attempt for their conversion. But what base ingratitude is this! To whom are we ourselves indebted for all our privileges, but to Jews? Who wrote, and preserved with such

[g] Isai. xliii. 12.

wonderful care, the Scriptures of the Old Testament? or who wrote the New Testament, but Jews? Who died to redeem our souls from death and hell? a Jew. Who at this moment makes intercession for us at the right hand of God? a Jew. Who manages every thing in heaven and earth for our good, and is a fountain of all spiritual good to our souls? a Jew. Of whom were the whole primitive Church composed for the first six or seven years? Jews. Who went forth with their lives in their hands, to convert the Gentiles; and to whom are we indebted for all the light that we enjoy? they were Jews. Have we then no debt of gratitude to them? And have we not reason to blush when we reflect on the manner in which we have requited them? Blessed be God! there are at last some stirred up to seek their welfare[h]. Let us unite with heart and hand, to help forward the blessed work. From what we see of their blindness and obduracy, we are apt to despond: but "the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save:" he can as easily engraft them in again upon their own stock, as he could engraft us upon it: and he has therefore engrafted us upon it, that we might exert ourselves in their favour, and be instrumental in restoring them to the blessings they have lost[i]. Let us at least do what we can, and leave the issue of our labours unto God.]

[h] Preached in 1810. [i] Rom. xi. 30, 31.

## CCXXV.

### THE WAY OF SALVATION PLAIN AND EASY.

Deut. xxx. 11—14. *This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.*

IT is a very prevalent idea in the world, that all people shall be saved by the law under which they live; so that Jews, Turks, and heathens of every description, have as good a prospect of salvation, as those who enjoy the light of the Gospel. But there has been only one way of salvation from the fall of Adam to the present moment. How far God may be pleased to extend mercy for Christ's sake to some

who have not had an opportunity of hearing the Gospel, we cannot presume to say: but to those who have the Scriptures in their hands we are sure that there is no hope of acceptance, but through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the way of salvation revealed to Adam, confirmed to Abraham, and more fully opened in the Mosaic law. It was of this that Moses spake in the words before us: to elucidate which, we shall inquire,

I. What is the commandment here spoken of—

What it was may be seen by consulting,

1. The testimony of Moses himself—

[It was not the *moral* law that was given on Mount Sinai, but "the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, *beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb*[a]." The law given on Mount Sinai, of which Horeb was a part, was strictly a covenant of *works:* but that which was given in the land of Moab, was a covenant of *grace.* That on Mount Sinai made no provision for the smallest transgression: it simply said, Do this, and live: but that in the land of Moab was accompanied with the sprinkling of the blood of sacrifices both on the altar and on the people[b]; and intimated, that through the blood of the great Sacrifice their iniquities, if truly repented of, might be forgiven. And this distinction is very carefully noticed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where St. Paul, mentioning some particulars not related by Moses, declares, that, by the covenant thus ratified, remission of sins was provided for, and might be obtained by all who sought it in the appointed way.]

2. An inspired exposition of the passage[c]—

[St. Paul is expressly contrasting the nature of the two covenants: the Law, he tells us, required perfect obedience, and said, "He that doeth these things shall live in them[d]." But the Gospel, that is, "the righteousness which is of faith, speaketh on this wise;" and then he quotes the words before us, and explains them as referring to the Gospel. Some have thought that he quoted these words only in a way of accommodation; but it is plain that he understood them as strictly applicable to his point. Speaking of the righteousness which is of faith, he says, "But what saith IT[e]?" He then, quoting

[a] Deut. xxix. 1. [b] Exod. xxiv. 3—8. [c] Rom. x. 5—10.
[d] Lev. xviii. 5. and Deut. xxvii. 26.
[e] Some would rather substitute the word HE. But our translation is right. See Beza *in loc.*

the very words of Moses, answers, "*The word* is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart;" and then he adds, "*This is the word of faith which we preach.*" If then the Apostle was inspired by the Holy Ghost, the matter is clear; and the Gospel was the commandment of which Moses spake. And it is worthy of observation, that Christ and his Apostles speak of it under very similar terms. Our Lord says, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent:" by which he means, that it is the work *which God requires of us*[f]. St. Paul calls the Gospel, "*the law* of faith[g]." St. John says, "This is his commandment, that ye believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ[h]." And "*obeying* the Gospel" is the common term used for believing in Christ[i].]

3. The particular characters by which it is distinguished—

[Moses speaks of it as *plainly revealed*, and as *easily understood*. Now this representation accords with that dispensation of the Gospel which was given to the Jews: *they* had no necessity for any one to ascend up to heaven, or to go over the sea, to bring them information about the way of life; for God had already revealed it to them from heaven: he had shewn them by the *moral* law that they were all in a state of guilt and condemnation; and he had shewn them by the *ceremonial* law that they were to be saved by means of a sacrifice, which should in due time be offered. And though that revelation was *comparatively* obscure, yet any Jew with pious dispositions might understand it sufficiently to obtain salvation by it.

But these characters in the fullest sense agree with the Gospel as it is made known to us. We are not left to inquire whether there is a Saviour or not? whether Christ has come down from above? or whether he has been raised up again from the dead? We know that he *has* come into the world; that he *has* "died for our sins, and has risen again for our justification:" we know that he *has done* every thing that is necessary for our reconciliation with God, and *will do* every thing that can be necessary for the carrying on and perfecting the salvation of our souls. There is *no uncertainty* about any point that is of importance to us to know. *Nor* indeed is there *any difficulty* in understanding what he has revealed. All that is required, is, a simple, humble, teachable spirit; and to such an one, however ignorant he be in other respects, every part of the Gospel is clear. The humble Christian "has within himself the witness" of all the fundamental truths of the Gospel. What doubt can he have that he is a guilty and condemned

[f] John vi. 28, 29. [g] Rom. iii. 27. [h] 1 John iii. 23.
[i] Rom. x. 15. and xvi. 26. 2 Thess. i. 8. 1 Pet. iv. 17.

creature; or that he needs an atonement for his sins, and a better righteousness than his own for his justification before God? What doubt can he have that he needs the influences of the Holy Spirit to renew him after the divine image, and to render him meet for heaven? "If the Gospel be hid from any, it is because the god of this world has blinded their eyes:" it is not the intricacy or obscurity of the Gospel that makes it unintelligible to them, but the simplicity and brightness of it: "they love darkness rather than light;" and complain of the Gospel, when the fault is only in themselves. As revealed *to* us, the Gospel is not obscure; but, as revealed *in* us, it is bright as the meridian sun.]

Such then "is the commandment which God commands us this day." We proceed to consider,

II. What is the obedience which it requires—

It demands from us,

1. An inward approbation of the heart—

[Without this all the knowledge of men or angels would be of little use. On this our salvation altogether depends. Moses says, "The word is in thy *heart:*" and St. Paul's exposition of it is, "If thou shalt believe in thine *heart* that God hath raised the Lord Jesus from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Thus a mere rational assent to divine truth is particularly excluded from the office of saving; and salvation is annexed to that faith only which calls forth all the affections of the soul, "a faith which worketh by love." As "a commandment," it is to have all the force of a law within us, "casting down imaginations with every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God," and "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." It is not sufficient that we acknowledge the death and resurrection of Christ as parts of our creed; we must see and feel the necessity of them in order to the deliverance of our souls from death and hell; and we must also glory in them, as the infinitely wise, gracious, and all-sufficient means of our redemption. We must have such a view of these truths, as makes us to "account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of them[k]." This was insisted on as necessary to the admission of converts into the Christian Church. And it is the experience of all who truly belong to Christ[l].]

2. An outward confession of them with the mouth—

[It is curious to observe what minute attention the Apostle

[k] Phil. iii. 8. [l] Rom. vi. 17. See the Greek.

paid to the words of Moses, and what emphasis he has laid upon them. Moses had transiently observed, "The word is in thy mouth and in thy heart;" but the Apostle amplifies the idea, and shews *repeatedly* that the confessing of Christ with the *mouth* is quite as necessary as the believing on him with the *heart:* by the latter indeed we obtain "righteousness;" but by the former we obtain complete "salvation[m]." In that age, to confess Christ before men was to subject oneself to persecutions and death in their most cruel forms: but our Lord would not acknowledge any one as his disciple, who should neglect to do it: he warned his disciples that such cowardice would infallibly exclude them from the kingdom of heaven. How necessary then and indispensable must a confession of Christ in this age be, when we have nothing to fear but the loss of some temporal interest, and the being stigmatized with some ignominious name! Truly, if *we* are ashamed to confess him, we may well be banished from his presence as the weakest and most contemptible of the human race[n]. Let this then be considered by all who would secure the salvation of their souls; they must openly confess their attachment to Christ, and must "follow him without the camp, bearing his reproach." A public acknowledging of him indeed will not supersede the necessity of internal piety; nor will the piety of the heart supersede the necessity of honouring Christ by an open profession of our faith: both are necessary in their place; and both must be combined by those who would derive any benefit from either.]

LEARN then from hence,

1. To value aright the privileges you enjoy—

[The Jews were far exalted above the heathen; but we are no less exalted above them: for we have the substance, of which they had only the shadow. But even among Christians also there is a great difference; some having the Gospel more fully and clearly opened to them than others. We pray God that the light which *you* enjoy may be improved by you; else it will leave you in a more deplorable state than Sodom and Gomorrha.]

2. To guard against entertaining discouraging thoughts about the salvation of your souls—

[Moses tells you that you have *no occasion* for such thoughts; and St. Paul *guards you against the admission of them* into your minds: "*Say not in thine heart,*" who shall do such and such things for me? It is very common for persons to think their salvation on one account or other unattainable. But "what could God have done for us that he has not done?" or what provision do we need which he has not laid up in store

[m] Rom. x. 9, 10. [n] Mark viii. 38.

for us? To say, 'This salvation is not for *me*,' is to contradict the Scriptures, and to "make God a liar." Repeatedly is it said, that "*whosoever* believeth in Christ, and *whosoever* shall call on his name, shall be saved." It matters not whether he be a Jew or a Gentile, a greater sinner or a less; for "God is rich unto *all* that call upon him," whatever guilt they may have contracted, or whatever discouragements they may labour under[o]. Put away then all unbelieving fears, and know, that, as the Gospel is revealed for the benefit of all, so it shall be effectual for all who believe and obey it.]

[o] Rom. x. 11—13.

## CCXXVI.

### THE GOSPEL CLEARLY CONTAINED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT[a].

Deut. xxx. 11—14. *This commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.*

THE Old Testament is a rich mine of spiritual knowledge, and reflects as much light upon the New Testament as itself receives from this fuller revelation of God's will. Each is necessary to the understanding of the other: in that is the model of the edifice, which, under the Christian dispensation, has been erected: and, if it were duly attended to, it would prove sufficient to convince the whole world, that Christianity is Judaism perfected and completed; perfected in all its types, and completed in all its prophecies. To this effect spake Moses in the words before us. "The commandment" which he mentions, is not to be understood, as many Jews imagine, of the law given upon Mount Sinai, but of another covenant which God entered into with his people in the land of Moab; and which was, in fact, the covenant of grace. It is by Moses himself distinguished

[a] The author's First Address to the Jews, at St. Catharine Cree, London. The preceding Discourse on the same text was written many years before, for *Gentiles*: this in 1818, for *Jews*.

from the covenant of works[b]: and that distinction is confirmed by the account which he gives of it elsewhere. The law, as published on Horeb or Mount Sinai, made no provision for the pardon of any sin whatever: it simply said, "Do this and thou shalt live:" but the covenant made afterwards in the land of Moab, was ratified with the blood of sacrifices; which blood was sprinkled upon the altar, the book, and all the people[c]; and *therefore* sprinkled, that they might know how to seek the remission of their sins, as often as occasion for it should arise[d]. In this act the gospel way of salvation was set before them; so that they needed not henceforth to be looking for any one to come down from heaven, like Moses, or from the depths of the sea, like Jonah, to proclaim it, seeing that it was "very nigh unto them" already, even "in their mouth," which approved of the law, and "in their heart," which loved it.

The things which the Gospel more particularly inculcates, are, Repentance, Faith, and Obedience; and these are almost as clearly revealed in the Old Testament as in the New.

To shew this to the Jewish people is, I conceive, the very first step towards bringing them to Christianity. The Apostles, when preaching to the Jews, always appealed to the Old Testament in confirmation of all that they delivered: and I also, after their example, will endeavour to shew you, my Jewish Brethren, that your own Scriptures declare in the plainest terms,

I. That you are guilty and condemned by the moral law.

The law is a perfect transcript of the mind and will of God; and it requires of every human being an obedience to all its commands. For one single transgression it utterly and eternally condemns us: nay more, it requires every individual to express his

[b] Deut. xxix. 1. [c] Exod. xxiv. 3—8.

[d] The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who was so deeply conversant with the whole of the Mosaic law, refers to this very covenant in this precise point of view. Heb. ix. 19, 20.

assent to this as true, and his approbation of it as right and good: "Cursed is he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them: and all the people shall say, Amen[e]." But of the impossibility of coming to God by the law, we have a most striking illustration in the conduct of your forefathers at the very time that the law was given: they were so terrified by all that they saw and heard, that they *repeatedly* declared, that, if the same scenes should pass again, "they should die:" they entreated that God would no more speak to them himself, but give them a Mediator, through whom they might receive his law in a mitigated form, and divested of those terrors which they were not able to endure. And of this request God expressed the highest approbation, saying, "They have well said all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them[f]!" In this matter, dearly beloved, my heart responds to the wish of your Almighty Lawgiver, 'O that there were in you such an heart!' Could we but once see you thoroughly convinced of your guilt and condemnation by the law, we should have no fear of your speedily and thankfully embracing the salvation offered you in the Gospel. The great obstacle to your reception of the Gospel is, that instead of regarding the law as a ministration of death and of condemnation, you are looking for life from obedience to it. True it is that *temporal* blessings were promised to obedience: and that eternal blessings also were promised to those who should "*lay hold on God's covenant*," and keep his commandments. But the covenant on which they were to lay hold, was that which had been made with their father Abraham; and which never was, nor could be, disannulled by the law. The law, as published on Mount Sinai, was intended to shut them up to this covenant, by making known to them the impossibility of being saved in any other way than by the promised Seed. And, when once you understand and feel this, you will not be far from the kingdom of God.

[e] Deut. xxvii. 26. [f] Deut. v. 22—29.

This conviction would also prepare you for another lesson taught you by Moses; namely,

II. That you must be saved altogether by an atoning sacrifice.

This was taught you throughout the whole ceremonial law: the daily and annual sacrifices proclaimed it to your whole nation. Nor was this merely taught in theory; it was required of every offender, whatever his sin might be, to bring his sacrifice, in order that it might be put to death in his stead, and deliver him from the condemnation which his sin had merited. Even for sins of ignorance this was required; and the offender, whether he were a priest, or an elder, or a ruler, or one of the common people, was required to *put his hands on the head of his sacrifice*, and thus, by the most significant of all actions, to transfer to it his sins[g]. What an instructive ordinance was this! Yet was the ordinance of the scape-goat, if possible, still more instructive. On the great day of annual expiation, the high-priest, after killing the goat on which the Lord's lot had fallen, was to put his hands on the head of the scape-goat, and to confess over him all the sins of all the children of Israel; and then the goat was led into the wilderness from before them all, never more to be seen; that so the removal of their sins might be made visible, as it were, to their bodily eyes[h].

Yet, whilst this glorious truth was thus plainly declared, the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices, and the necessity of a better sacrifice, was proclaimed also. For these very sacrifices were to be repeated from year to year; which shewed, that the guilt expiated by them was not fully removed. Hence the very sacrifices were, in fact, no other than an annual remembrance of sins, not finally forgiven. In this light they were viewed by those of your forefathers whom you cannot but venerate, and whom

[g] Lev. iv. 4, 15, 24, 29. [h] Lev. xvi. 20—22.

I believe to have been inspired of God, the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[i].

The same thing was intimated by the very partial appointment of sacrifices. There were many sins, as adultery and murder, for which no sacrifice was appointed. Indeed, presumptuous sins, of whatever kind they were, if remission was to be obtained by sacrifices, could never be forgiven; because no sacrifice was appointed for them. Nor, in truth, was any man made perfect as pertaining to the conscience by any of the sacrifices; because every man had a secret suspicion at least, if not conviction, that the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away sin[k]. Still, however, the great end was answered of directing the eyes of all to the appointed sacrifices, and through them to the Lord Jesus Christ, the great sacrifice, whose blood alone can cleanse from sin, and who is "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Dear Brethren, it was to this better sacrifice that David looked, when, after the commission of adultery and murder, he prayed, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow[l]." Let your eyes be directed to the same sacrifice, even to your Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the Prophet Isaiah says, "He was wounded for our transgressions:" and again, "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquities of us all." This is He whom your forefathers pierced, and nailed to the cross; and through whom thousands of those who crucified him, found peace with God: and, if you also could now be persuaded to look unto him for salvation, you would immediately experience the effect produced by the brasen serpent in the wilderness, and be healed every one of you. O that you would obey the direction given you in the writings of your own prophets, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." You would no longer continue strangers to peace and joy; (for strangers ye must be to these divine sensations, whilst ye are condemned by the

[i] See Heb. x. 1—4. [k] See Heb. x. 1—4. [l] Ps. li. 7.

law, and ignorant of the way in which your guilt is to be removed:) on the contrary, your "peace should flow as a river," and, as "children of Zion, you should be joyful in your King."

But further, it is declared in your law,

III. That all who are thus saved, must be holy in heart and life.

God, as you know, requires you to be "holy as he is holy;" and to be "a peculiar people unto him above all the people upon earth." And I the rather bring this to your minds, because you are ready to think that we wish to proselyte you to Christianity, that we may have to glory in such an accession to our cause. But I beg leave to assure you, that I would not move a finger to proselyte your whole nation to our religion, if I did not at the same time raise them to be better men, fitter to serve their God on earth, and fitter to enjoy him for ever in heaven. And this I entreat you to bear in mind. It is to the divine image that we wish to bring you, and to the full possession of that blessing promised to you by Jehovah himself; "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. And I will take away the heart of stone out of your flesh, and will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and to keep my judgments and do them[m]." This is necessary for you, as it is also for us: nor have we ourselves any other rule of conduct than that which was prescribed to you in the Ten Commandments. The advantage we have in the New Testament is not that new things are revealed to us, but that the things originally revealed to you are made more clear and intelligible. Not that in your Scriptures there is any obscurity in relation to this matter: we may truly say, "It is not far off, nor is it hidden from you; but it is very nigh unto you, even in your hands and in your mouth:" I pray God we may be

[m] Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.

able to add, as Moses did in my text, that it is "in your heart" also!

And now permit me to ADDRESS a few words to you, MY JEWISH BRETHREN—

It is to your own Scriptures that I wish in the first instance to direct your attention: for you yourselves know that they testify of your Messiah, and are intended to direct you to him. It is greatly to be lamented, that they are not studied amongst you as they ought to be; and that your Rabbis for the most part pay more deference to the voluminous commentaries with which your Scriptures are obscured, than to the Scriptures themselves. But let it not be so with you. Begin to search the Scriptures for yourselves: search them as for hid treasures; and pray to God to give you his Holy Spirit, to instruct you, and to guide you into all truth. When you take the blessed book of God into your hands, lift up your heart to God, and say with David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law!" Then compare your Scriptures with ours, the Old Testament with the New; and mark how exactly they correspond with each other, even as the vessel with the mould, or the wax with the seal. Then I fear not but that you will soon acknowledge Him of whom the Law and the Prophets do speak, even Jesus of Nazareth, to be the true Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Yes; he whom you have hitherto rejected will become precious to your souls; and you will, in a far higher sense than you have ever yet been, become the children of Abraham, and the sons of God.

To the CHRISTIAN part of this auditory I will also beg leave to ADDRESS a few words—

You have seen that with care and labour I have endeavoured to establish the true import of my text from the writings of Moses himself. But, if I had been speaking to you only, I might have spared that trouble, having the text already explained to my hand by God himself. St. Paul tells us, that the commandment which was nigh to the Jews, was the Gospel

itself, even that word of faith which declares, that whosoever with the heart believes in Christ, and with the mouth confesses him, shall assuredly be saved[n]. How thankful should we be for such a light! and having been favoured with it, shall we conceal it from our Jewish brethren, from whom, under God, we have received it? What would you think of a man, who, being stationed in a light-house for the purpose of warning ships in its vicinity to avoid some rocks, and of directing them into a safe harbour, should, when he saw a whole fleet approaching, conceal the lights, and leave the whole fleet to perish on the rocks; and, when called to an account for his conduct, should say, 'I did not think it right to create any alarm among the crews and their passengers?' Would you think his excuse valid? Would you approve of his pretended benevolence? Would you not rather be filled with indignation against him, and say, that the blood of all who perished should be required at his hands? Do not ye then act in a way, which, under other circumstances, you would so severely condemn: but, as God has given you a light, improve it carefully for your Jewish brethren. This is what their fathers did for you, when you were bowing down to stocks and stones. Do ye it then for them, if peradventure you may be the means of enlightening some amongst them, and of saving their souls alive.

At the same time remember, that St. Paul applies the passage unto you; and tells you from it, that you must believe in Christ with your hearts, and confess him openly with your mouths. The word is, in the strictest sense, "*very nigh* unto *you:*" read it then, and ponder it in your hearts, and treasure it up in your minds, and live upon it, and glory in it: so shall it be a light to your paths, and make you wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[n] Rom. x. 5—13.

## CCXXVII.

### A FAITHFUL MINISTER'S APPEAL.

Deut. xxx. 19. *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.*

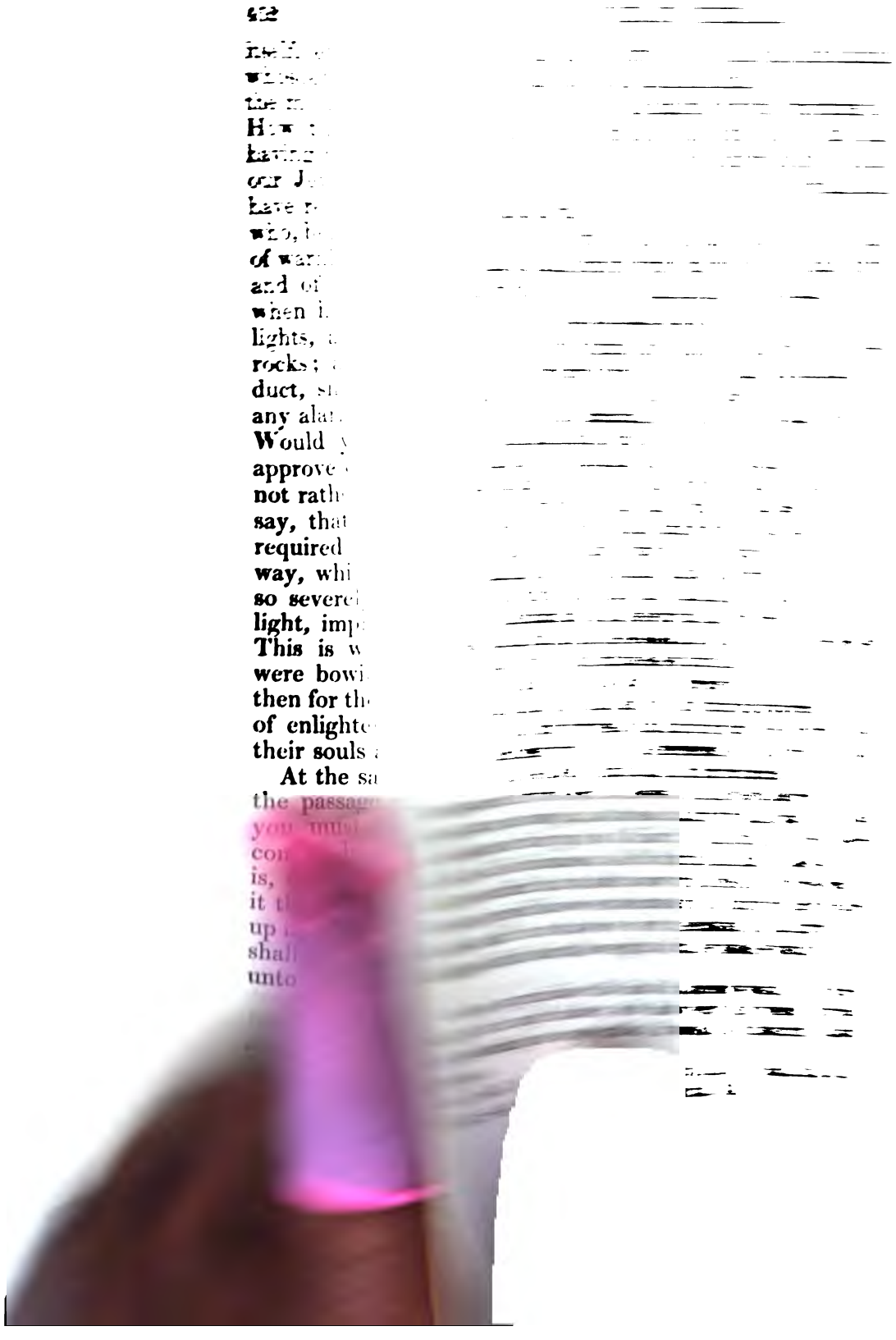
HOWEVER long a minister may continue with his people, he must part from them at last, and be summoned to give up his account of all his ministrations to them. Moses had now presided over Israel for the space of forty years: and the time was come that he must die[a]. But, before his death, he warned them with all fidelity, setting life and death before them: and, in the words which I have just read, he appealed to them, that he had discharged his duty towards them fully in these respects; and urged them to improve the privileges which they had so long enjoyed.

Let me call your attention to,

I. His appeal—

It is justly said of him, both in the Old Testament and in the New, that "he was faithful in all his house[b]." And, indeed, not even Paul himself laboured under greater disadvantages, or persevered with more unwearied diligence than he. The whole of God's laws, *moral, ceremonial, judicial,* did he make known to the people, enforcing the strict observance of them all (whether "*commandments, statutes,* or *judgments*") on the penalty of death. The violating of any one of them wilfully and presumptuously, was declared to be such an act of rebellion against God, that nothing less than utter excision was the punishment annexed to it[c]. On the other hand, he promised to them, that, if they were observant of God's blessed will, they should live, and long enjoy their promised inheritance[d]. And so uniformly had he devoted all his time and strength to their service, that he could call both

[a] Deut. xxxi. 2.
[b] Numb. xii. 7. Heb. iii. 2.
[c] Numb. xv. 30.
[d] ver. 16—18.



2. We have too, according to our ability, ministered with the same fidelity—

[We hope we may, without presumption, appeal to you, as the Apostle Paul did to the elders of Ephesus, not only that "we have kept back nothing that was profitable unto you," but that "we have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God; and are therefore, as far as relates to that, pure, not from your blood only, but from the blood of all men[n]." You yourselves will bear me witness, that, notwithstanding "the offence of the cross, which neither is ceased, nor can cease[o]," I have at all times gloried in it, and exalted it as the only means of our reconciliation with God[p]. Nor have I ever amused you with *speculative theories:* no; I have preached the Gospel *practically;* and not *in a cold and formal manner,* but as *a matter of life and death.* I have never ceased to exhibit it with all its awful sanctions; assuring you of life, if you would believe in Christ; and denouncing the wrath of God against all who would not obey the Gospel; executing in this respect the commission given me, to preach the Gospel to every creature, saying, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned[q]." Never, at any time, have I dissembled these truths; "never daubed the wall of God's sanctuary with untempered mortar," nor "sewed pillows to the armholes of my people," to let them find ease in sin: never have I "spoken peace to you, when there was no peace," or "promised life" in any other way than a total surrender of yourselves to God[r]. And here I will mention one point, which, from the beginning, I have kept in mind without turning to the right hand or to the left—I have never perverted one passage of Scripture to make it speak the language of human systems. I have been anxious to set before you the "unadulterated word" of God[s]; and to let it speak for itself, without ever concerning myself what HUMAN system it either countenanced or opposed: having been "allowed of God to be put in trust with the Gospel, we have spoken, not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts[t];" and with the "utmost plainness" too[u], "not with enticing words of man's wisdom," "lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect[x]."

Whilst, however, "we call heaven and earth to record this day" respecting these things, let it not be supposed that we are not conscious of innumerable short-comings and defects in our

[n] Acts xx. 20, 26, 27. [o] Gal. v. 11. [p] Gal. vi. 14.
[q] Mark xvi. 15, 16. [r] Ezek. xiii. 10, 18, 22.
[s] 1 Pet. ii. 2. and 2 Cor. ii. 17. [t] 1 Thess. ii. 4, 5.
[u] 2 Cor. iii. 12. [x] 1 Cor. i. 17. and ii. 4, 5.

ministrations: for we are filled with nothing but shame and confusion of face in the review of them, God knoweth: but as far as respects the fidelity of them, we can, and do, appeal both to God and man, that, like Moses, we have faithfully and invariably "set before you life and death, blessing and cursing," according as they are revealed in the Gospel, and as they shall be awarded to those who receive or reject the Gospel.]

And now let me call your attention to,

II. The advice he founds upon it—

"Choose life;"

A free choice is given to every one amongst you—

[The Gospel is freely preached to you all: and you are all at liberty to embrace or to reject it. Almighty God is sincere when he says, that "he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth[y]." Never did he reprobate any man, till that man had brought that sentence upon himself by his own wilful obduracy. The whole Scripture bears testimony to this truth. If this be not true, how can we ever explain that solemn oath of Jehovah; "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he turn from his wickedness and live. Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways: for why will ye die, O house of Israel[z]?" There is not a human being that is excepted from the invitations of the Gospel, or from its blessings, if he accept them. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth! for I am God: and there is none else[a]." And "him that cometh unto me, (whoever he be, or whatever he may have done,) I will in no wise cast out[b]." Moreover, the fault of rejecting these overtures is always imputed to the sinner himself: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life[c]." If any could have been supposed to have been reprobated from all eternity, it was the persons who were given up to reject their Messiah, and to crucify the Lord of glory: yet over them did our blessed Lord mourn, saying, "How often would I have gathered you, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not[d]." That we have *a bias* towards corruption, is certain: but there is *no compulsion*. That Satan also is permitted to *tempt* us, is certain: but *he cannot compel* any man. We are perfectly free agents in all that we do, whether it be good or evil. If it be said, that God "draws men," it is true: but he "draws them with the cords of a man, and with the bands of love[e]." And, if he

[y] 1 Tim. ii. 4. and 2 Pet. iii. 9. [z] Ezek. xxxiii. 11.
[a] Isai. xlv. 22. [b] John vi. 37. [c] John v. 40.
[d] Matt. xxiii. 37. [e] Hos. xi. 4.

prevail over the reluctance of their hearts, it is not by the exercise of an overpowering *force*, but by "*making them willing* in the day of his power[f]." If he "work in them to *do*," it is by "working in them to *will*[g]." And I will appeal to every living man, whether he ever did good or evil by *compulsion against his will?* That he has acted against his *judgment* and his *conscience*, is true enough, and *that* in ten thousand instances: but against his *will* he never did. God sets good before us; and Satan evil: and, whichever we prefer, that we *choose*, and that we *do*.]

## Exercise, then, your choice with true wisdom—

[The generality, in spite of all that we can say, will choose evil. It is in vain that we endeavour to allure them by the offer of "life," or to alarm them with the threatening of "death:" they prefer evil with all its consequences; and therefore they do it: as God has said; "He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me *love death*[h]." But do not ye act thus. "Choose good:" "choose life; that both ye and your seed may live." Of the beneficial consequences to *yourselves* you cannot doubt: for, who ever sought the Lord, and was rejected? "Who ever truly believed in Christ, and was confounded[i]?" Who ever "chose the good part, and had it violently taken away from him[k]?" Choose God for your Father; and he will acknowledge you as his children. Choose Christ as your Saviour; and "he will present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." Choose the Holy Spirit as your Sanctifier; and "he will perfect that which concerneth you," and "complete in you the work he has begun." Choose heaven for your inheritance; and sooner shall heaven and earth pass away, than you be permitted to come short of it. The very choice you make will evince, that you yourselves have been chosen of your God[l]: and "his gifts and calling are without repentance[m]."

And shall not this tend to the benefit of "*your seed*" also? Is it not a part of God's covenant, that "he will put his fear in our hearts, for the good of us, and of our children after us[n]?" What is there so likely to benefit the rising generation as the piety of their parents? The force of good instruction is great: but when enforced by good example, it is almost irresistible. Children of pious parents, who have *diligently instructed* them, and "laboured earnestly and constantly in prayer to God for them," cannot sin so easily as others: or if, through the power of temptation, they be drawn aside after wickedness, they will, it is hoped, feel the remonstrances of

[f] Ps. cx. 3. [g] Phil. ii. 13. [h] Prov. viii. 36.
[i] 1 Pet. ii. 6. [k] Luke x. 42. [l] John xv. 16. and 1 John iv. 19.
[m] Rom. xi. 29. [n] Jer. xxxii. 39.

conscience in seasons of sickness and reflection, and be brought home at last with penitential sorrow to their God. At all events, we have encouragement to hope, that "our labour for them shall not be in vain in the Lord;" and that, though in some instances we should fail, it shall be found *generally* true, that, if we "bring up a child in the way he should go, when he is old he will not depart from it."]

That I may ENFORCE the counsel in my text, I would beg you to consider,

1. The alternative that is here offered you—

[It is not "life" or *annihilation*, but "life or death;" not "a blessing, or *a mere privation of good*," but, "a blessing, or a curse." And have you ever thought what that "death" is, and what that "curse?" Oh! who shall declare what that "second death" is, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; or what that "curse," which shall be there endured? Were annihilation, or eternal sleep, the alternative, you would at least have the consolation of knowing, that you would be unconscious of your loss: but, as you must *live for ever*, either in heaven or in hell, I entreat you to "choose that life," which shall be "at God's right hand, in pleasures for evermore[o]."]

2. The responsibility attaching to you for the privileges you enjoy—

[Our blessed Lord said respecting his hearers, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin[p]." And may I not say the same to you? Doubtless, if you had the Gospel ministered unto you with less clearness and fidelity, you would have less to answer for, even as Sodom and Gomorrha had on this very account a lighter condemnation than Bethsaida and Capernaum[q]. It is certainly a great comfort to a minister to know that "he has delivered his own soul[r]." But it is a painful reflection to think, that the very means he has used for the salvation of his people, will in many cases only increase their guilt; and the word he has spoken to them, instead of being to them a savour of life, will only be a savour of death to their more aggravated condemnation. Beloved, let me not have to appear in that day as "a swift witness against you," but rather have to present you to God as my children[s], and possess you as "my joy and crown of rejoicing for evermore[t]."]

3. The nearness of the final issue—

[o] Ps. xvi. 11. [p] John xv. 22. [q] Matt. xi. 20—24.
[r] Ezek. xxxiii. 8, 9. [s] Isai. viii. 18. [t] 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.

[Moses had ministered to his people for *forty years:* and *it is now just about that time that I have ministered to you.* How much longer God may be pleased to continue my labours amongst you, he alone knows: but, according to the course of nature, it cannot be long. Be in earnest, then, to improve the light whilst you have it[u]. Many who are gone to judgment would be glad enough if they could come back again to hear the invitations and warnings which they once slighted. And it is possible, that, when the present ordinances shall have come to an end, and the tongue that has so often warned you lies silent in the grave, you may wish that you had "known the day of your visitation," and improved the privileges you once enjoyed. Let us all "work while it is day: for the night cometh, when neither your minister can work for you, nor you for yourselves." And the Lord grant, that, whilst we are continued together, I may so preach the word, and you receive it, that we may stand with boldness before God, and obtain his plaudit in the day of judgment!]

[u] John xii. 36.

## CCXXVIII.

### MOSES' ENCOURAGING ADDRESS TO ISRAEL.

Deut. xxxi. 6. *Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*

THE application of passages in the Old Testament to the Church at this time is thought by many to be an unwarrantable liberty, especially if those passages referred to any particular occasion, and still more if they primarily related to any particular individual. We are far from saying that great caution is not requisite on this head; but we feel no hesitation in affirming, that passages in the Old Testament, whether general or particular in their primary import, are applicable to the Church of God in all ages, as far as the situations and circumstances of the Church resemble that in former times: nay, we go further still, and affirm, that passages, which in their primary sense related only to temporal concerns, may fitly be applied at this time in a spiritual sense, as far as there exists a just analogy between the cases. We cannot have a stronger proof of this than in the

words before us. They were first addressed by Moses *generally* to all Israel, when they were about to invade the land of Canaan. They were then addressed *particularly* to Joshua in the sight of all Israel[a]: and they were afterwards again addressed to Joshua by God himself[b]. Now it might be asked, Have *we* any right to apply these words to the Church at this time? and may any individual in the Church consider them as addressed personally and particularly to himself? We answer, Yes; he may; and moreover may found upon them precisely the same conclusions as Israel of old did. For this we have the authority of an inspired Apostle; who, having quoted the words in reference to the whole Christian Church, adds, "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper; and I will not fear what man shall do unto me[c]." Thus then are we warranted to address the words to you in relation to that warfare which you are to maintain against all the enemies of your salvation: and this we will proceed to do.

Brethren, we suppose you now in the state of Israel when addressed by Moses. And if, like Moses, we knew that the superintendence of your spiritual concerns was speedily to be devolved to another, and that this was the last time that we should ever address you, we could not do better than amplify and expand his ideas, contained in the words before us.

You, Brethren, are about to engage in a most arduous warfare—

[The enemies of Israel were numerous and very powerful: they were men of gigantic stature, and they "dwelt in cities walled up to heaven." There were no less than "seven nations greater and mightier than Israel," and all these were confederate together for the defence of Canaan. But these were weak, in comparison of the Christian's enemies. You, Brethren, have to conflict with the world and all its vanities, the flesh and all its corruptions, the devil and all his wiles. There is not any thing you see around you, which is not armed for your destruction: nor is there any thing within you which does not

[a] ver. 8, 23. [b] Josh. i. 5, 9. [c] Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

watch for an opportunity to betray your soul, and to inflict on it the most deadly wounds. Yet these enemies, notwithstanding their number and power, are quite overlooked by St. Paul, and counted as nothing, in comparison of those mighty adversaries, the principalities and powers of hell[d]. Their inconceivable subtlety, their invisible combination, their pre-eminent strength, their inveterate malignity, together with the easiness of their access to us at all times, render them formidable beyond measure; insomuch that if you had not an Almighty Friend to espouse your cause, you might well sit down in despair.]

In the prospect of this contest you are apt to indulge desponding thoughts—

[Forty years before, the Israelites had refused to encounter their enemies, from an apprehension that they were invincible: and it is probable that they were not without their fears at this time. And what is it that at the present day deters multitudes from engaging in the *spiritual* warfare? is it not a fear that they shall not succeed? When we tell them that they must overcome the world, and mortify the flesh, and resist the devil, they reply, that these things are impossible; and that it is in vain to make such an impracticable attempt[e]. Even those who have fought well on particular occasions, are apt to faint, when their trials press upon them with more than usual weight: David himself yielded to unbelieving fears[f], and exclaimed in his haste, "All men are liars[g]." Perhaps there is not one amongst us whose "hands have not sometimes hanged down, and his knees been weary, and his heart faint;" not one who has not needed, like St. Paul himself, some peculiar manifestations of God for his support[h].]

But there is no real cause for discouragement to any of you—

[It is alleged perhaps, that your enemies are mighty; but "your Redeemer also is mighty;" and "if he be for you, who can be against you?" If it be your own weakness that depresses you, only view it in a right light, and the most consolatory considerations will spring from it: for "when you are weak, then are you strong;" and the more sensible you are of your own insufficiency for any good thing, the more will God magnify his own power towards you, and "perfect his own strength in your weakness." The peculiar appositeness of our text to all such cases is evident from the repeated application of it to persons under discouragement, and the blessed effects produced by it. We have already supposed the discouragement

[d] Eph. vi. 12. [e] Jer. xviii. 12. [f] Ps. lxxvii. 7—10.
[g] Ps. cxvi. 11. with lxxiii. 13. [h] Acts xxiii. 11.

to arise from a view of duties impracticable, or of difficulties insurmountable: but, in the former case, David consoled Solomon[i], and, in the latter case, Hezekiah comforted the Jews[k], with the very address which we are now considering: a sure proof, that it contains a sufficient antidote against all disquieting fears, of whatever kind they be, and to whatever extent they may prevail.]

God promises to his people his presence and aid—

[If he refused to go forth with you, you might well say with Moses, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence[l]." Even if he offered to send an angel with you, it would not be sufficient[m]. But he has promised to be with you himself, and to exercise all his glorious perfections in your behalf. As in the days of Joshua he sent his Son to be "the Captain of the Lord's host[n]," so has he given him to be "a Leader and Commander unto" *you*[o]: by whom he says to you at this hour, "Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." Having then *his* wisdom to guide you, *his* arm to strengthen you, *his* power to protect you, what ground can you have for discouragement? "If *he* be for you, who can be against you[p]?"]

Nor will he ever fail you or forsake you—

[There may be times and seasons when he may suffer you to be assaulted with more than usual violence; but he will never give you up into the hands of your enemy, or "suffer you to be tempted above your strength:" or if for gracious purposes he see fit to withdraw himself, it shall only be "for a little moment," that he may afterwards the more visibly shew himself in your deliverance. Respecting this he engages in the strongest manner; and refers us to the rainbow in the heavens as an infallible pledge of his faithfulness and truth[q]. Created helps may fail us; but our God never will[r]; and you may "be confident that, having begun a good work in you, he will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ[s]." The manner in which the Apostle quotes the words of our text, abundantly shews how assured he was that it should be fulfilled; for he uses no less than five negatives to express the idea with the utmost possible force, and then "*boldly*" draws the inference for us, that we have nothing to fear from our most inveterate enemies[t].]

Let these considerations then inspire you with confidence and joy—

[i] 1 Chron. xxviii. 20. [k] 2 Chron. xxxii. 6—8.
[l] Exod. xxxiii. 15. [m] Exod. xxxiii. 2. [n] Josh. v. 13, 14.
[o] Isai. lv. 4. [p] Rom. viii. 31. [q] Isai. liv. 7—10.
[r] 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17. [s] Phil. i. 6. [t] Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

[Hear the animated exhortation which God himself gives you by the Prophet Isaiah; "Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness[u]." If you reply, that there are mountains of difficulty before you, and you but as a worm to contend with them; then says God, "Fear not, thou *worm* Jacob; behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth; thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff; thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel[x]." "Who then art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker[y]?" All that you have to do is, to wait upon your God; and then, in spite of all your apprehensions of failure, or even of occasional defeats, you shall rise superior to your enemies, and be triumphant over them at last[z]. I say then to you in the words of our great Captain, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom[a]."]

Let the *captives of Satan* arise and assert their liberty—

[Behold the kingdom of heaven is before you, "that good land flowing with milk and honey:" and will ye be content that your great adversary shall rob you of it without a struggle? Know that there is armour provided for you; and that if you go forth against him clad with it, you cannot but conquer. O enlist under the banners of the Lord Jesus, and go forth in his strength! fight a good fight; quit yourselves like men; be strong; and be assured, "your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."]

Let *the timid* take courage, and return to the charge—

[Think not of your own weakness, but of the Lord's strength. Remember what he has done for his people in old time. Did not the walls of Jericho fall at the sound of rams' horns? Was not Midian vanquished by a few lamps and broken pitchers? Did not Goliath fall by a sling and a stone? Ah! know that your enemies shall be like them, if only you will take courage. "Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you." See what Joshua did to the five confederate kings[b]: thus shall

[u] Isai. xli. 10. [x] Isai. xli. 14—16. [y] Isai. li. 12, 13.
[z] Isai. xl. 27—31. [a] Luke xii. 32. [b] Josh. x. 24, 25.

you also do in due season; for the true Joshua has promised that "he will bruise Satan under your feet shortly[c]."]

Let *the strong* remember in whom their strength is—

[Let not any think themselves so strong, but that they still need, even as Joshua himself did, a word of exhortation and encouragement. Be not self-confident even for a moment, lest God leave you to yourselves, and you "be crushed before a moth." Peter will remind you how weak you are, if not upheld by God; and what Satan can accomplish, if permitted to sift you as wheat. "Be not high-minded then, but fear:" yet fear not others, but yourselves only. Be weak *in* yourselves, and strong in the Lord; and then you may dismiss every other fear, and already begin the shout of victory.]

[c] Rom. xvi. 20.

## CCXXIX.

### THE APPROACH OF DEATH.

Deut. xxxi. 14. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die.*

"TO man there is an appointed time upon earth." But the precise measure of our days is in mercy hid from us. On some occasions, however, God has been pleased to make it known, and to declare with precision the near approach of death, that so the persons whose fate was made known might employ their remaining hours in perfecting the work which he had given them to do.

The intimation here given to Moses, we shall consider,

I. As addressed to Moses in particular—

In this view, it comes with peculiar weight to those churches which have been long under the superintendence of an aged minister.

Moses had long watched over Israel—

[For the sake of Israel he had renounced all that the world could give him, and subjected himself to many trials, and exposed himself to many dangers: "He had refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," and abandoned all the pleasures and honours of a court; "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and esteeming the reproach of Christ greater

riches than all the treasures of Egypt." From a regard for them, he had braved all the wrath of Pharaoh in his most infuriated state; and had led them forth, unarmed and unprovided, in the hope of bringing them to a land flowing with milk and honey. As God's appointed instrument, he had made known to them the will of God; and had shewn them, by a great variety of ordinances, the means which God had provided for their acceptance with him. He had for the space of forty years together fed them with bread from heaven and with water out of the stony rock. Times without number had he interceded for them, when if his hands had hanged down, and his heart had fainted, their ruin would inevitably have ensued. In a word, he had lived but for them. In all that space of time, not a day had occurred which he had not occupied in their service: and could he but see them happy, nothing that he could forego, nothing that he could do, nothing that he could suffer, was regarded by him as worthy of a thought; so entirely were his interests and happiness bound up in theirs.]

But now his care over them must cease—

[God had determined that he should not go over Jordan[a]. This was in part the punishment of his sin at Meribah, when, instead of sanctifying the Lord in the eyes of all Israel by a believing expectation of water from the rock in answer to *his word*, he *struck* the rock, yea, struck it *twice*, with an unhallowed irritation of mind[b]. But, in part, this exclusion was intended to shadow forth the nature of that dispensation; and to shew, that *one violation* of the law was sufficient to exclude a soul from Canaan; and that all who would obtain an entrance into the promised land, must turn from Moses to Joshua (the Lord Jesus Christ), who alone can save any child of man.

Moses was now a hundred and twenty years of age: but he was still, as far as natural strength was required, as competent as ever to watch over the people, and to discharge his duty to them. But his time was come; and he must transfer his office to another. Happily for him, and for all Israel, there was a Joshua ready to fill his place; and God had ordained him to occupy the vacant post, and to take on him the oversight of this bereaved people. And could *we* but see that the charge we vacate would be so supplied, verily, a summons into the eternal world would be a source of unqualified joy. The most painful thought in the separation of aged ministers from their people is, that they know not on whom the care of them shall devolve, whether on one who will watch for their souls, or on one, who, content with a mere routine of duties, will leave them to be scattered by every one that shall choose to invade the fold.

[a] ver. 2. [b] See Numb. xx. 7—12.

However this be, a time of separation must come: the pastor who has fed you more than forty years must be taken from you: and how soon, who can tell? It may be, yea, it is highly probable, that this year will be his last. Certain it is, that "his days approach," and very rapidly too, "when he must die;" and when the connexion that has subsisted between you and him must for ever cease. To God he must give account of his ministry among you; as must all of you, also, in due season, of the improvement made of it. And it is an awful thought, that your blood will be required at his hand, as will all his labours for your good be required at yours. The Lord grant, that when we shall meet around the judgment-seat of Christ, we may all "give up our account with joy, and not with grief!"]

But let us turn from the particular instance, and consider the intimation,

II. As applicable to every child of man—

It is true respecting every child of man: for we no sooner begin to breathe than we begin to die: and the life, even of the longest liver, is "but as a span long." "Our time passeth away like a shadow:" and death, to whomsoever it may come, involves in it,

1. A dissolution of all earthly ties—

[The husband and wife, how long soever they may have been bound together in love, and how averse soever they may be to separate, must be rent asunder; and, whilst one is taken to his long home, the other must be left to bewail his sad bereavement with unavailing sorrow. Perhaps there was a growing family, that needed their united care, and that must be deprived of innumerable blessings, which, according to the course of nature, they were entitled to expect. But the hand of death cannot be arrested by the cries of parental anxiety or of filial love: it seizes with irresistible force its destined objects; and transmits them to Him whose commission it has executed, and whose will it has fulfilled. Methinks it were well for those who stand in any one of these relations, to bear in mind how soon they may be bereaved, and how speedily what has been only committed to them as a loan, may be demanded at their hands.]

2. A termination of all earthly labours—

[We may have many plans, either in hand or in prospect; but death, the instant it arrives, puts an end to all——— We may have even formed purposes in relation to our souls: we may have determined that we will, ere long, abandon some

evil habits in which we have lived, or fulfil some duties which we have hitherto neglected. We may have thought, that to repent us of our sins, and to seek for mercy through Christ, and to give all diligence to the concerns of our souls, was the path which true wisdom dictated; and that we would speedily commence that salutary course. But death, having once received its commission to transmit us to the presence of our God, can take no cognizance of any good intentions: it executes its office without favour to any; and, in the instant that he inflicts the stroke, his victim, whoever he may be, falls; "his breath goeth forth, and he returneth to his earth; and in that very day all his thoughts perish[c]."]

3. A fixing of our eternal doom—

[Whatever be the state of our souls in the instant of death, that it will continue to all eternity: "As the tree falleth, so it must lie." If we have lived a life of penitence and faith, and devoted ourselves truly unto God, it is well: death will be to us only like "falling asleep" in the bosom of our Lord. But, if we have neglected these great concerns, or not so far prosecuted them as to have found favour with God, death will be to us only like the opening of our prison-doors, in order to the execution of eternal vengeance on our souls. Prepared or unprepared, we must go into the presence of our God, and receive at his hands our eternal doom. Oh, fearful thought! But so it must be; and, the instant that the soul is separated from the body, it will be transmitted either to the paradise of God, or to the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone. The day of judgment will make no difference, except that the body will then be made to participate the portion of the soul; and the righteousness of God, in the sentence awarded, will be displayed to the admiration of the whole assembled universe.]

Let this subject be IMPROVED by us,

1. For the humbling of our souls in reference to the past—

[We have known the uncertainty of life; and have seen, in the mortality of those around us, the approach of death: but how marvellous is it, that these sights should have produced such little effect upon our souls! Verily, if we did not *know* the insensibility of man under circumstances of such infinite moment, we should scarcely be able to *credit* what both our observation and experience so fully attest.]

2. For the quickening of our souls in reference to the future—

[That "the day of death *approaches*," we are sure: at

[c] Ps. cxlvi. 4.

what precise distance it is, we know not. But should not this thought stimulate us to improve our every remaining hour? Yes, verily: we should turn unto God without delay; and "apply our hearts to wisdom" with all diligence: and so "watch for the coming of our Lord, that, at whatever hour it may be, we may be found ready." "What I say therefore to one, I say unto all, Watch."]

## CCXXX.

### THE SONG OF MOSES A WITNESS AGAINST THE JEWS.

Deut. xxxi. 19. *Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.*

IN order that Moses in his own person should exemplify the nature of that law which he had given, it was appointed of God that he should die for one offence, and not have the honour of leading the people of Israel into Canaan. The time of his departure was now nigh at hand; and God said to him, "Behold, thy days approach that thou must die." Little remained for him to do. He had written the whole of his law, and had "delivered it unto the priests," that they might "put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord their God." But God would have a song composed, which should contain a brief summary of his dealings with his people, and which should be committed by them to memory, as "a witness for him against themselves." This song we now propose to consider: and we shall open to you,

I. Its subject-matter—

As being an epitome of all their past history, and of God's dispensations towards them to the end of time, its contents are various: they are,

1. Commemorative—

[It records God's sovereign mercy to that people in *the original designation of the land of Canaan to them*, even from the first distribution of mankind over the face of the earth. When the sons of Adam and of Noah multiplied in the earth, he so ordered and overruled their motions, that the descendants of

wicked Canaan should occupy that land, and prepare it, as it were, for Israel; and that the Israelites should be just ready to possess it when the inhabitants should have filled up the measure of their iniquities, and become ripe for the execution of the curse of God upon them. It was *in reference* to the children of Israel that "the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance," and set the bounds of each peculiar people[b].

*The manner also in which he had brought them to it* is particularly specified. He had brought them through a waste howling wilderness, where he had preserved them by an uninterrupted series of miracles, and had instructed them in the knowledge of his will, and had kept them as the apple of his eye, and had made them the objects of his tenderest solicitude, like the eagle fostering, instructing, and protecting her helpless offspring[c].

*The richness of the provision which he had made for them* is also described in animated and appropriate terms. The fertility of the land, the stores administered even by its barren rocks, the countless multitudes of its flocks and herds, together with the abundance of its produce in corn and wine, all are set forth, in order that the nation even to their latest posterity might know how to appreciate the goodness of God to them, and be suitably impressed with a sense of their unbounded obligations[d].]

2. Prophetic—

[God had before declared what the ultimate fate of that nation would be: but here he states it in a compendious way. He foretells both *their sins*, and *their punishment*. Notwithstanding all that he had done for them, they would soon forget him, and would stupidly worship the idols of the heathen, which had not been able to protect their own votaries. Thus would they entirely cast off their allegiance to him, and provoke him to execute upon them his heaviest judgments[e]. Even for their past abominations he would have cast them off, if he had not been apprehensive that their enemies would have exulted, and taken occasion from it to harden themselves in their atheistical impiety. But by effecting his purposes in the first instance, and delaying his judgments to a future and distant period, he should cut off all occasion for such vain triumphs, and should display at once his mercy and forbearance, his power and justice, his holiness and truth[f].

The terms in which his judgments are predicted necessarily carry our minds forward to the times of the present dispersion.

[b] Deut. xxxii. 8.
[c] Deut. xxxii. 10—12.
[d] Deut. xxxii. 13, 14.
[e] Deut. xxxii. 15—20, 22—25.
[f] Deut. xxxii. 26, 27.

Awful as was their punishment in Babylon, it fell short of these menaces, which were only to receive their *full* accomplishment, when they should have filled up the measure of their iniquities in the murder of their Messiah. This is evident from that part of the song which is,]

3. Promissory—

[Fixed as was God's determination to inflict "vengeance" upon them "in due time," he revealed also his determination not to cast them off for ever, but in their lowest extremity to remember and restore them[g]. He would indeed banish them from that good land, and admit the Gentiles into fellowship with him as his peculiar people in their stead: but, whilst he calls on "the Gentiles to rejoice" on this account, he calls on the Jews also to *participate* their joy: for though they should be long oppressed by cruel enemies, God would appear again for them, "avenging the blood of his servants, and rendering vengeance to his adversaries," and would again "be merciful unto his land, and to his once most highly-favoured people[h]."

These promises shall in due time be fulfilled: and we trust that the time for their accomplishment is not now far distant. "The root of Jesse now stands for an ensign to the nations;" and whilst "the Gentiles are seeking to it," we hope that God will speedily set it up also as an ensign to the Jews, and "assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth[i]."]

These things were comprehended in "*a song*, which was to be taught the children of Israel." We proceed to consider,

II. Its peculiar use—

It was "to be a witness *for* God *against* the children of Israel," and was for this end to be transmitted to their latest posterity. It was intended in this view,

1. To justify God—

[When God should have inflicted all these judgments upon his people, they might be ready to reflect on him as variable in his purposes, and cruel in his dispensations. But he here tells them beforehand what he would do, and for what reason he would do it. The change that was to take place, would not be in him, but in them. The very change of his dispensations would prove to them the unchangeableness of his nature. It was for the wickedness of the Canaanites that he was about to cast them out: and for the same reason he would cast out the

[g] Deut. xxxii. 36. [h] Deut. xxxii. 43. with Rom. xv. 10.
[i] Isai. xi. 10—12, 15, 16.

Israelites also, when they should have provoked him to anger, by sinning in a far more grievous manner, against clearer light and knowledge, and against infinitely greater obligations than they. Of this he forewarned them; and the fault, as well as misery, would be all their own. "His work is perfect: all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is he[k]."]

2. To humble them—

[The Jews were at all times a stiff-necked people, "a perverse and crooked generation." The best period of their history was from the death of Moses to the death of Joshua: yet God testified respecting them even then, that they manifested all those evil dispositions, which in process of time would be matured, and grow up into an abundant harvest: "I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I sware[l]!" Hence every Jew must see, that as his forefathers were not put into possession of that land for their righteousness, so he, and all his whole nation, are banished from it for their iniquities. And oh, how humiliating the comparison between their present, and their former, state! once the glory of the whole world, and now "an astonishment, and a proverb, and a by-word in every nation where they dwell." They need only repeat this song, and they have enough to shew them how low they are fallen, and enough to humble them in dust and ashes.]

3. To prepare them for his promised blessings—

[The promise of a future restoration would of itself be sufficient to stimulate their desires after it. But it is worthy of observation, that the very judgments which God here denounces against them are as strongly expressive of his gracious intentions towards them, and as encouraging to their minds, as the promise itself: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with them which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation[m]." Thus whilst he transferred the blessings of salvation to the Gentiles, he did it no less for the good of his own rebellious and apostate people the Jews, than for the Gentiles themselves; hoping thereby to stir them up to seek a participation of those privileges, which, when exclusively enjoyed by them, they had despised[n]. This idea, the moment it shall enter into their minds, will afford them rich encouragement: and we are persuaded, that, if the Christian world evinced a just sense of the

[k] Deut. xxxii. 4.
[l] ver. 21.
[m] Deut. xxxii. 21. with Rom. x. 19.
[n] Rom. xi. 11—14.

mercies they enjoy, and walked worthy of them, the Jews would soon be stirred up to seek those blessings, in the contempt of which they are hardened by Christians themselves.]

Let us LEARN then from hence,

1. To cultivate a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures ourselves—

[To *us* also are they *a witness*, as they were to the Jews of old, and are at this day: only they testify *for God* and *against us* in a thousand-fold greater degree. Hear what our blessed Lord himself affirms: "Search the Scriptures; for they are they which *testify of me*." O what mysteries of love and mercy do the New-Testament Scriptures attest! the incarnation, the life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension of Jesus Christ; his supremacy over all things in heaven and earth; together with all the wonders of redeeming love; how loudly do they testify *for Christ;* and how awfully will they testify *against us*, if we neglect them! If God commanded that the Jews, "men, women and children, and the strangers within their gates, should at stated times be gathered together, to hear the *law*, and learn to fear the Lord and to do his commandments," and that every individual among them in all successive ages should learn this song; much more ought *we* to assemble ourselves together for public instruction, and to commit to memory select portions of Scripture, and to teach them diligently to our children, in order to obtain for ourselves, and to transmit to others, the knowledge of God's will as it is revealed to us in the *Gospel*[o]! We call upon all of you then to study the Holy Scriptures in private; to teach them to your children and servants; to be useful, where you can, in reading them to your poorer neighbours, who through ignorance are unable to read them for themselves, or through sickness are incapacitated from attending the public ordinances. To be active also in the conducting of *Sunday schools* is a service most beneficial to man, and most acceptable to God.]

2. To impart the knowledge of them to the Jewish nation—

[They, alas! have almost universally forgotten this song: but we have it in our hands, and profess to reverence it as the word of God. Ought we not then to concur with God in that which was his special design in transmitting it to us? Ought we not to use it as the means of conviction to the Jews; and as the means of consolation to them also? Ought we not to seek that they may be partakers of our joy, and be again engrafted on their own olive-tree? Yet, strange as it may appear,

[o] ver. 12, 13.

not only have mere nominal Christians neglected them, but even the godly themselves have for the most part overlooked them, as much as if they were in no danger, or as if their conversion were an hopeless attempt. But we need not occupy your time in proving the danger of their state: for if they were not perishing, why did Christ and his Apostles make such efforts to save them? Nor need we labour to prove their conversion practicable, when God has declared it to be certain. Let then our bowels of compassion yearn over them: let us grieve to see them perishing in the midst of mercy: let us unite our endeavours to draw their attention to the Holy Scriptures, and to the Messiah, whom they have so long continued to reject. Let us constrain them to see what blessings they despise; what holiness and happiness we ourselves have derived from the Lord Jesus, and what they lose by not believing in him. In this way let us endeavour to provoke them to jealousy. Then may we hope to see the veil taken from their hearts, and to have them associated with us in adoring the once crucified Jesus, and in singing to all eternity "the song of Moses and the Lamb."]

## CCXXXI.

### THE CHARACTER OF JEHOVAH.

Deut. xxxii. 1—4. *Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God. He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

IN this chapter is contained the song which Moses wrote for the conviction of the Jews in all future ages, especially in that period when they should have provoked God to scatter them over the face of the whole earth. Its general contents have been before considered[a]. At present we shall confine ourselves only to its exordium, in which Moses *addresses the whole creation*, and then *describes the character of the Creator*. An invocation of "the heavens and the earth" is not uncommon in the Scriptures: it is used in order to impress men with a deeper sense of the

[a] See Discourse on Deut. xxxi. 19.

importance of the subject, and to convey an idea, that even the inanimate creation will rise up in judgment against the children of men, if they should disregard the voice of their Creator. After requesting their attention, he declares, that the whole tendency of his discourse, and especially of that part which exhibits the character of the Deity, is to comfort and enrich the souls of men. As the dew and rain descend gently and silently upon the earth, softening the parched ground, refreshing and invigorating the drooping plants, and administering nourishment to the whole vegetable creation, so was his word intended to administer blessings to mankind, quickening the most dead, softening the most obdurate, comforting the most disconsolate, and fertilizing the most barren, among them all.

We are aware that a directly opposite effect is in general ascribed to a faithful ministration of the word: it is in general supposed, that a scriptural representation of the divine character must of necessity alarm and terrify mankind: but, whatever effect it may produce on them that are determined to hold fast their sins, it cannot fail to comfort all whose minds are duly prepared to receive it, and to operate on their souls as rain upon the new-mown grass. This will appear, whilst we,

I. Illustrate the representation here given of the Deity—

The description which Moses gives of Jehovah is short, but comprehensive: it sets forth,

1. His personal majesty—

[The term "Rock" is often used in reference to the Deity; and intimates to us both what he is *in himself*, and what he is *to us*. *In himself* he is the great unchangeable Jehovah; and *to his people* a safe and everlasting Refuge. Whether it be from the storms of temptation or the heat of persecution, he affords protection to all who flee unto him[b] ——— and, to those who build upon him, he is an immovable foundation: nothing shall ever shake them; nothing shall ever disappoint them of their hopes[c] ———]

[b] Isai. xxxii. 2. [c] Isai. xlv. 17.

2. His providential government—

[Deep and mysterious are his ways, yet are they all ordered in perfect wisdom and goodness. In *the world*, in *the Church*, and *in our own individual cases*, there are many things which we cannot account for; yet if we imagine that any one of them could have been more wisely appointed, we only betray our own ignorance and presumption. We cannot tell why God confined the revelation of his will to one single family for so many ages, or why it is still known to so small a part of the world: but in due time God will make it evident that such a mode of dispensing mercy was most conducive to his own glory. When a persecution arose in the Church about Stephen, and the saints, driven from Jerusalem, were scattered over the face of the earth, it probably appeared to them an inexplicable dispensation: but the benefit of it soon appeared, because the banished Christians propagated the Gospel wherever they came[d]. And when Paul was confined in prison two years, it might be thought a most calamitous event: yet does he himself tell us, that it tended "rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel[e]." Thus, in innumerable instances, we are ready to say, like Jacob, "All these things are against us," when in fact they are "all working together for our good;" and we are constrained after a season to acknowledge, that our greatest crosses were only blessings in disguise[f].]

3. His moral perfections—

[Justice, holiness, and truth, are inseparable from the Deity; "He is a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." The present state of things indeed does not afford us a just criterion whereby to judge of these perfections; because eternity is not open to our view: but the brightest display of them that can be exhibited to mortal eyes, is seen in the great work of redemption: for God has determined not to *pardon any* of the human race (at least, not any to whom the light of revelation comes,) except in a way that shall magnify these perfections; nor will he *condemn any*, without making them witnesses for him, that he is holy, and just, and true. It is for this very end that he sent his only-begotten Son into the world: for, by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, Jesus has made a complete satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and opened a way for the exercise of mercy in perfect consistency with all the other attributes of the Deity. The true believer makes an open confession of this, and acknowledges, that all his hopes are founded on the sacrifice of Christ: the unbeliever experiences in his own person the weight of that justice, which he would not honour in the person

[d] Acts viii. 1, 4. [e] Phil. i. 12—14. [f] Ps. xcvii. 2.

of his surety: so that all in heaven, and all in hell too, are constrained to say, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints[g]."]

That we may make a practical use of the Divine character we shall,

II. Shew how to make it a source of comfort to the soul—

If the Deity is an object of terror to any, it must arise either from an erroneous idea of his character, or from an opposition of mind to it. In order then to derive comfort from it, we must,

1. Get a just and comprehensive view of the Divine perfections—

[If, as is too often the case, we paint to ourselves a God all mercy, who will never vindicate the honour of his law, nor ever fulfil his threatenings against sin or sinners, we may allay our fears for the present, but we can never bring peace or comfort into the soul: for, as we have no foundation for such an idea of the Deity, we never can divest ourselves of the apprehension that we may be mistaken, and that we may find him at last such a Being as the Scriptures represent him. On the other hand, if we view nothing but his justice, he must of necessity appear terrible in our eyes, because we cannot but know that we are transgressors of his law. But if we regard him as he is set forth in his word, and particularly as he appears in the person of Christ, then do we find in him all that is great and good, yea all that our souls can wish for, or our necessities require — — —]

2. Get our own hearts suitably affected with them—

[Whilst the *majesty* of God should fill us with holy awe, and his power make us fearful of incurring his displeasure, these exalted perfections should encourage an affiance in him, as an almighty Helper, and an all-sufficient Protector. His very *sovereignty* should lead us to apply to him for mercy, because he will be most glorified in shewing mercy to the chief of sinners. Of course, a view of his *love*, his *mercy*, and his *truth*, must inspire us with holy confidence, and dispel all the fears which conscious unworthiness must create: we should therefore contemplate them with unceasing care, as the grounds of our hope, and the sources of our eternal welfare. Nor is it of small moment to have our minds impressed with a sense of his wisdom and goodness in all his providential dealings. It

[g] Rev. xv. 3.

is by *that* that we shall have our minds composed under all the most afflictive dispensations, and encouraged to expect a happy issue out of the most calamitous events — — — In a word, the representations which God has given of himself will then be most delightful to us, when our hearts are most filled with humility and love.]

APPLICATION—

[" Hear now, O ye heavens! and give ear, O earth!" say whether these views of the Deity do not tend to the happiness of man? O that God would " shine into all our hearts, to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ!" then should our " meditation of him be sweet," and our fruits abound to the praise and glory of his grace.]

---

## CCXXXII.

### GOD'S REGARD FOR HIS PEOPLE.

Deut. xxxii. 9—12. *The Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.*

THE declarations of God in his word are the principal source from whence we derive our knowledge of the Deity. But much may be learned also from the dispensations of his providence, both from those which are recorded in the inspired volume, and those which pass daily before our eyes: nor can we more profitably employ our thoughts than in meditating on his dealings towards the Church in general, and ourselves in particular. This Moses recommended to the Israelites just before his final departure from them. He assured them that God, as far back as the Deluge, had appointed the boundaries of the different kingdoms, with an express reference to the children of Israel; and that he had assigned to Canaan, that accursed son of Noah, and to his posterity, the land which he had marked out for his chosen people, and which they, in pursuance of his will, were now about

to possess[a]. And, with respect to themselves in particular, he had conducted them with astonishing kindness and condescension from their first entrance into the wilderness to that present moment.

His words on that occasion will naturally lead us to consider,

I. God's interest in his people—

God regarded his ancient people as his portion and inheritance—

[When he brought his people into Canaan, he divided the land amongst the twelve tribes, assigning to each by lot their destined inheritance. Thus amongst all the people upon the face of the earth he chose, as it were by lot, ("the whole disposal whereof is of the Lord,") the descendants of Abraham as *his* portion. Even amongst these he selected only a part, adopting Isaac, and not Ishmael, and still further limiting his choice to Jacob and his posterity, whilst he withheld this privilege from Esau. *These* he chose, not because they were either more numerous or more holy than other people; for "they were the fewest of all people," and "a stiff-necked generation from first to last." "He loved them purely because he would love them[b]," and, having "set them apart for himself," he ordained them to be his own portion and his own inheritance.]

In precisely the same view he regards his chosen people at this day—

[He has a people still, whom "he chose from before the foundation of the world[c]," and "predestinated to the adoption of children to himself[d]," and accounts as "his peculiar treasure above all people upon the face of the earth[e]." Respecting all who truly believe in Christ it is said, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people[f]:" and from these, as from an inheritance, does God expect "a revenue of praise" and glory, such as he receives not from the whole world besides[g]. It is "of his own purpose and grace alone that he has called them to this honour," without being influenced by any goodness in them[h]: his choice of them was wholly irrespective of their works, past, present, or future[i]: "he loved them, and not they him[k]:" "he chose them, and not they him[l]:" for his own sake, and not theirs, he has vouchsafed to them his grace, that to all eternity they may be monuments of his sovereign love and mercy[m].]

[a] ver. 7, 8. [b] Deut. vii. 6—8. [c] Jer. xxxi. 3. Eph. i. 4.
[d] Rom. viii. 29. [e] Exod. xix. 5. [f] 1 Pet. ii. 9.
[g] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [h] 2 Tim. i. 9. [i] Tit. iii. 5.
[k] 1 John iv. 10. [l] John xv. 16. [m] Isai. xliii. 21.

But that which our text chiefly leads us to consider, is,

II. His tender care over them—

This towards his ancient people is illustrated both by *an appeal to fact,* and by *an apt and beautiful similitude*—

[It was in the wilderness that he first formed them into a peculiar people for himself. There he took the entire charge of them, leading them in all their way, and supplying their every want. There he instructed them both by his providence and grace; shewing them by all his diversified dispensations the extreme depravity of their own hearts, and the marvellous patience and long-suffering of their God[n]. Had he even for a few days intermitted his care over them, they must all have perished; being in the midst of perils on every side, and incapable of protecting themselves against any of the dangers to which they were exposed. But "he kept them even as the apple of his eye," so that no evil whatever, except what he himself sent for their correction, could assail them. An eagle is very careful of its young: and when the dam judges that her young are prepared to fly, will "flutter over them, and spread abroad her wings, and stir up her nest," that one or other of her offspring may try their powers: and with such tenderness does she watch the attempt, that, if the scarcely fledged young one prove incapable of stretching its flight so as to return to its nest, she will, with incredible swiftness and skill, fly to its succour, and on her own wings bear it back in safety to its wonted home. Thus did God encourage his ancient people to soar towards heaven, and succour them effectually in every hour of need. And in all this he acted "alone, there being no strange god with him," nor any that could claim the smallest measure of honour from their success. The passage of the Red Sea, the bread from heaven, and the water from the rock, the passage of Jordan, and the fall of Jericho, with a thousand other events, clearly shewed, that all that was effected for them was done by him *alone.*]

And is he not alike attentive to his people now?—

[Where did he "find any of us," my Brethren, but "in a waste howling wilderness," where we must have inevitably perished, if he of his own sovereign grace and mercy had not come to our relief? And how has he "led us about" even to the present hour, not in the way that would have been most pleasing to flesh and blood, but in the way which he knew would be most conducive to our good, and to the glory of his own name! In this way he has conveyed to our minds such

[n] Deut. viii. 15, 16. Neh. ix. 19—21.

instruction as we could not by any means have so well received in any other way. By his word and by his Spirit he has imparted to us much knowledge of himself: but by his various dispensations, and especially those of a more afflictive nature, he has led us into discoveries of his perfections, which we could never otherwise have obtained. Oh! what views has he given us of our own deserts and of his own tender mercy towards us! In fact, we may, in his dealings with his people in the wilderness, see as in a glass all that is passing in the Church at this day, and all that is passing in our own hearts: and our heavenly rest will be infinitely the more endeared to us from our recollection of all our troubles by the way, and of the infinite wisdom and power and love by which we have been led in safety through them.]

THINK then I pray you, Brethren, what should be our regard towards this Almighty Saviour—

[Who was it that led his people through the wilderness in the days of old? It was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Angel of the covenant: for he it was whom they tempted[o], and he it was "whose reproach Moses counted to be of more value than all the treasures of Egypt[p]." That same Jesus is still "Head over all things to his Church[q]," and "guides all his chosen people by his counsel, till he brings them safely to his glory."

I ask then with confidence should we not *love him* with most intense affection? and *trust in him* with unshaken affiance? and *serve him* with all the powers of our souls? Methinks, there should be no bounds to our love and gratitude, no limit to our zeal in his service[r]. We all see and acknowledge this in reference to the Jews, who were favoured with his *visible* interposition: and how much more is it all due from us, who enjoy the substance, of which they had but the shadow! I call you then, every one of you, to shew forth your sense of the obligations conferred upon you, and, if possible, to be as zealous in his service as he is in yours.]

[o] Exod. xxiii. 20. 1 Cor. x. 9. [p] Heb. xi. 26.
[q] Eph. i. 22, 23. [r] Deut. x. 14, 15. 1 Sam. xii. 24.

## CCXXXIII.

### THE JEWS MOVED TO JEALOUSY BY THE GENTILES.

Deut. xxxii. 21. *They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.*

"KNOWN unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Moses informs us, that, in the very first distribution of men over the face of the earth, God had an especial respect to those, who, at a remote period, should spring from the loins of Abraham; and that he assigned to the descendants of cursed Ham that portion of the globe which, in due time, should be delivered into the hands of Israel, cultivated in every respect, and fit for the accommodation and support of the Jewish nation: "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to (or, in reference to) the number of the children of Israel[a]. Yet at the very time when God carried this decree into execution, at the time when the nation of Israel were, by the discipline of forty years in the wilderness, brought to a state of faith and piety that was never equalled at any subsequent period of their history, even then, I say, did God foresee their declension from his ways, and inspire Moses to predict the wickedness which they would commit, and the chastisements which should be inflicted upon them on account of it: he even instructed Moses to record the whole beforehand in a song, which was, in all succeeding ages, to be committed to memory by the children of Israel, and to be a witness for God against them. It was probable that, when he should change his conduct towards them, they would reflect on *him* either as mutable in his purposes, or as unable to execute his promises towards them: but this song would completely vindicate him from all such aspersions, and be a standing proof to them, that their miseries were the result of their own incorrigible perverseness. "Now," says God, "write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be *a witness for me against the children of Israel.* For when I shall have brought them into the land which I sware unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey;

[a] ver. 8.

and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant. And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I sware[b]."

In this song are foretold the awful apostasies of the Jewish nation, together with all the judgments that would be inflicted on them, from that time even to the period of their future restoration.

The words which I have chosen for my text, contain the sum and substance of the whole: they specify the ground of God's displeasure against his people, and the way in which he would manifest that displeasure: and they particularly mark the correspondence which there should be between their sin and their punishment: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

In discoursing on these words, there are two things to be considered;

I. The import of this prophecy respecting the Jews;

II. The use to be made of it by us Gentiles.

I. The import of this prophecy—

The general facts relating to it are so well known, that it will not be necessary to enter very minutely into them. Every one knows how highly favoured a people the Jewish nation have been; how exalted and privileged above all other people upon earth. The manner also in which they requited the kindness of their God, is well known. We are not disposed to think that human nature is worse in them than in

[b] Deut. xxxi. 19—21.

others: the reason that it appears so is, that God's conduct towards them, and theirs towards him, is all exhibited to view, and forms a contrast the most humiliating that can be imagined. On some particular occasions they seem to have been penetrated with a becoming sense of the mercies vouchsafed unto them; but these impressions were of very short duration: within the space of a few days only, they forgot that wonderful deliverance which had been wrought for them at the Red Sea; as it is said, "They remembered not the multitude of his mercies, but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red Sea." Every fresh difficulty, instead of leading them to God in earnest supplication and humble affiance, only irritated their rebellious spirits, and excited their murmurs against God and his servant Moses. Scarcely had three months elapsed, when, whilst God was graciously revealing to Moses that law by which the people were to be governed, they actually cast off God; and, because Moses had protracted his stay in the holy mount beyond what they thought a reasonable time, they would wait for him no longer; but determined to have other gods in the place of Jehovah, and another guide in the place of Moses: "Up," said they to Aaron, "make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him." Immediately "they made a golden calf (in imitation of the Egyptian Apis), and worshipped it, and sacrificed thereto, and said, These by thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Thus early did they shew that propensity which was so fatal to them in after ages. In process of time they degenerated so far as to adopt all the gods of the heathen for their gods; even those gods who could not protect their own votaries, did this rebellious people worship, in preference to Jehovah, who had done so great things for them: "they worshipped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites, and Chemosh,

the abomination of the Moabites;" yea, "they made their children to pass through the fire unto Moloch," and "sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood." Even in the very house of God itself did they place their idols; as though they were determined to provoke the Lord to jealousy beyond a possibility of endurance; nor were there any rites too base, too impure, or too sanguinary for them to practise in the worship of them. Many times did God punish them for these great iniquities, by delivering them into the hands of their enemies; and as often, in answer to their prayers, did he rescue them again from their oppressors. But at last, as he tells us by the prophet, he was even "broken with their whorish heart:" and, as they would persist in their idolatries notwithstanding all the warnings which from time to time he had sent them by his prophets, he was constrained to execute upon them the judgment threatened in our text.

This is the account given us by the inspired historian: "All the chief priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy. Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age; he gave them all into his hand[c]."

In confirmation of this exposition of our text, the

[c] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 14—17.

Jewish writers refer to a passage in the Prophet Isaiah[d]. The Chaldeans were but very recently risen into power; for, many hundred years after the Jews were established in the land of Canaan, the very name of Babylon was not at all formidable to Israel, or perhaps scarcely known. It was originally owing to the Assyrians that Babylon was exalted into so great and powerful a state: as, says the prophet, in the passage referred to, "Behold, the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof." Now to be vanquished by such a people, and to be carried captive to such a place, appeared a peculiar degradation; which may be supposed to be in part an accomplishment of those words, "I will move them to jealousy with *them which are not a people;* I will provoke them to anger with *a foolish nation.*"

But that there was to be a further accomplishment of those words, we cannot doubt. Indeed, the Jews themselves acknowledge, that their present dispersion through the world is a continuation of those very judgments which were denounced against them by Moses. Not only the learned amongst them acknowledge this, but, as Moses himself foretold, even the most ignorant of the Jews are well aware of it. Moses says, in Deut. xxxi. 17, 18, "My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not amongst us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods." Now "the Jews themselves (as Bishop Patrick observes) take notice that these words have been fulfilled by the many calamities which have befallen them since the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. This

[d] Isai. xxiii. 13.

appears from *Schebet Jehuda*, where *Solomon Virgæ* quotes this very verse, to prove that their present sufferings proceed not from nature, but from an angry God, more powerful than nature[e]."

The truth is, that this prophecy received but a very partial accomplishment at that time: for there were but two tribes sent to Babylon; the other ten were carried captive to Assyria. Now the idea of "provoking them to jealousy by those who were not a people," could have no place in reference to the ten tribes, because Assyria was an empire almost thirteen hundred years before Israel was conquered by them[f]; and to the other two tribes, provided they were to be carried captive at all, it could make but little difference whether the nation that subdued them was of greater or less antiquity. For the full accomplishment of the prophecy, therefore, we must undoubtedly look to the times subsequent to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans.

And here is a matter for the consideration of every Jew, that wishes to form a correct judgment of the main point that is at issue between the Jews and Christians.

The miseries inflicted on the Jewish nation by the Romans, both in the siege of Jerusalem and in their subsequent dispersion throughout the world, have been incomparably more grievous than any that ever were inflicted on them by the Chaldeans. I would ask then of the Jew, What has been the cause of this severe chastisement? What has your nation done to provoke God in so extraordinary a degree? There must be some particular crime that they have committed: what is it? God is too righteous, and too merciful, to afflict them without a cause. I ask, Are any of your Rabbis able to assign an adequate reason for these severe judgments? Your former idolatries were punished in the Babylonish captivity: and you repented of those sins; insomuch that from the time of your return to your own land, to the destruction of your nation by the Romans, you not

[e] Sect. 13. [f] See Prideaux's Connexion.

only never relapsed into idolatry, but you withstood every attempt to ensnare or to compel you to it. Yet, as your sufferings since that period have been so heavy and protracted, it must be supposed that your fathers committed some crime of deeper die, or at least some that was of equal enormity with your former idolatries. I ask then again, What crime is it? for there is not one of you that will venture to say, that God punishes you without a cause. If you cannot tell me, I will tell you what that crime is: it is *the crucifying of your Messiah.* You know, and your Rabbis all know, that there was a very general expectation of your Messiah at the precise time that Jesus came into the world. You know that Jesus professed himself to be the Messiah: you know also that he wrought innumerable miracles in confirmation of his claim: you know that he appealed to Moses and the prophets as bearing witness of him: you know that he foretold all that he should suffer; and shewed, that in all those sufferings the prophecies concerning him would be fulfilled: you know also, that the crucifying of him was a national act, in which all ranks and orders of your countrymen concurred; and that when Pilate wished to free himself from the guilt of shedding innocent blood, they all cried, "His blood be on us, and *on our children!*" You know, moreover, that Jesus foretold the destruction of your city and nation by the Romans, together with your present desolate condition, *as the punishment that should be inflicted on you for your murder of him:* nay more, that these things should befall your nation before that generation should pass away. You know also, that, agreeably to his predictions, they did come to pass about forty years after his death, and that these judgments have been upon you from that time to the present hour. If you say, that only two of the tribes were thus guilty of putting him to death; I answer, that every Jew in the universe approves and applauds that act; and that therefore the judgments are inflicted on them all, and will continue to be inflicted, till they

repent of it. All preceding judgments were removed, when your fathers repented of the crimes on account of which they had been inflicted: and the reason that your present judgments are not removed, is, that your enmity against the Lord Jesus is at this hour as strong as ever; and, if he were to put himself in your power again, you would conspire against him as before, and crucify him again. Yet, if *He* was not *the Messiah, your Messiah* is not come; and, consequently, those prophecies in your inspired volume which foretold his advent at that time, are falsified. Your Messiah was to come before the sceptre should finally depart from Judah, and while the second temple was yet standing, and about the time that the seventy weeks of Daniel should expire: but the sceptre *is* departed, and the temple *is* destroyed; and Daniel's weeks *are* expired; and nearly eighteen hundred years have elapsed, since the period fixed by these prophecies for his appearance. It is evident therefore that all these prophecies have failed of their accomplishment, if your Messiah is not yet come. As for saying, that the coming of the Messiah was deferred by God for the wickedness of your nation, what proof have you of it? Where has God threatened *that*, as a consequence of your wickedness? No: your Messiah is come; and has been treated in the manner which your own prophecies foretold, and as Jesus himself foretold: and though you, like your forefathers, in order to set aside the testimony of his resurrection, have recourse to that self-destructive falsehood of his being taken away by his own disciples, whilst a whole guard of Roman soldiers were asleep, you know that his disciples did at the very next festival, on the day of Pentecost, attest that he *was* risen, and attest it too in the very presence of the people who had put him to death, no less than three thousand of whom were converted to him on that very day: you know too, that in a short time myriads of Jews believed in Jesus; and that his Gospel continued to prevail throughout the known world, till the judgments threatened

against your nation for destroying their Messiah came upon them.

Now by this act, the crucifying of your Messiah, you did *provoke God to jealousy* to a greater degree than by any of your former crimes; for God sent you his co-equal, co-eternal Son: he sent you that Divine Person, who was "David's Lord," as well as "David's Son." The learned men of his own day acknowledged that the names, Son of man, and Son of God, were of the same import; and that, as assumed by Jesus, both the one and the other amounted to an assertion, that he was equal with God. You know also that his claiming these titles was the ground on which they accused him of blasphemy, and demanded sentence against him as a blasphemer. Thus according to your own acknowledgment, supposing him to have been the person foretold by the prophets as the Messiah, you have "crucified *the Lord of Glory*." Moreover, about the time that your fathers crucified him, they were ready to follow every impostor that assumed to himself the title of Messiah. "Gamaliel, a member of the Sanhedrim, a doctor of law, a man who was in high repute among all the Jews," acknowledged this readiness of the people to run after impostors: he mentions a person by the name of Theudas, who, with four hundred adherents, was slain: and after him one Judas of Galilee, who drew away much people after him, and perished[g]. We are informed also that Simon Magus, by his enchantments, seduced all the people of Samaria, from the least to the greatest, and persuaded them that "He was the great power of God[h]." Your own historian[i] bears ample testimony to these facts. Here then you can see how you have provoked God to jealousy, in that you have destroyed his own Son, who came down from heaven to instruct and save you: yea, though he brought with him the most unquestionable credentials, and supported his claim by the most satisfactory evidences, you rejected him

[g] Acts v. 34—37. [h] Acts viii. 9—11. [i] Josephus, lib. vi. cap. 5.

with all imaginable contempt, whilst you readily adhered to any vile impostor that chose to arrogate to himself the title of Messiah. Your former idolatries, though sinful in the extreme, were less heinous than this, inasmuch as the manifestations of God's love were far brighter in the gift of his Son, than in all the other dispensations of his grace from the foundation of the world; and the opposition of your fathers to him was attended with aggravations, such as never did, or could, exist in any other crime that ever was committed.

Here then we are arrived at the true reason of the judgments which are at this time inflicted on you.

Now let us investigate the judgments themselves; and you will see that they also are such as were evidently predicted in our text.

You are cut off from being the people of the Lord, and are absolutely incapacitated for serving him in the way of his appointments. On the other hand, God has chosen to himself a people from among the Gentiles, from "those who were not a people," and were justly considered by you as "a foolish nation," because they were altogether without light and understanding as it respected God and his ways. This you know to have been predicted by all your prophets, insomuch that your fathers, who looked for a temporal Messiah, expected that he would bring the Gentiles into subjection to himself, and extend his empire over the face of the whole earth. *This* the Lord Jesus has done: he has taken a people from among the Gentiles, who are become his willing subjects. Now this rejection of the Jews from the Church of God, and this gathering of a Church from among the Gentiles, is the very thing which in all ages has most angered you, and provoked you to jealousy. When Jesus himself merely brought to the remembrance of your fathers, that God had, in the days of Elijah and Elisha, shewn distinguished mercy to a Sidonian widow, and Naaman the Syrian; they were filled with such indignation, that, notwithstanding they greatly admired all the former part of his

discourse, they would have instantly cast him down a precipice, if he had not escaped from their hands[k]. When, on another occasion, he spoke a parable to the chief priests and elders, and asked them "what they conceived the lord of the vineyard would do to those husbandmen who beat all his servants, and then murdered his Son in order to retain for themselves the possession of his inheritance, they were constrained to acknowledge, that he would destroy those murderers, and let his vineyard to others who should render him the fruits in their season:" and on his confirming this melancholy truth with respect to them, they exclaimed, "God forbid[l]!" When the Apostles of Jesus afterwards preached to the Gentiles, the Jews could not contain themselves; the very mention of the name Gentiles, irritated them to madness[m]: so indignant were they at the thought of having their privileges transferred to others, whom they so despised. And thus it has been ever since. Nothing is so offensive to a Jew at this day, as the idea of Christians arrogating to themselves the title of *God's peculiar people.* The present attempts to bring the Jews into the Church of Christ are most displeasing to them: they regard us as modern Balaams, rising up to bring a curse upon their nation: and when any are converted from among them to the faith of Christ, the old enmity still rises in the hearts of their unbelieving brethren; who are kept only by the powerful arm of our law from manifesting their displeasure, as they were wont to do in the days of old[n].

Here then you see the text fulfilled in its utmost extent: here also you see that perfect correspondence between the guilt and the punishment of the Jewish nation, which was predicted: they have provoked God to jealousy by following vile impostors and rejecting his Son; and he has provoked them to jealousy by rejecting them, and receiving into his Church the ignorant and despised Gentiles.

And now let me ask, Is this exposition of the text

[k] Luke iv. 22—30. [l] Matt. xxi. 33—41. and Luke xx. 14—16.
[m] Acts xiii. 44, 45. 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16. [n] Acts xxiii. 21, 22.

novel? No: it is that which is sanctioned by your own prophets, supported by our Apostles, and confirmed by actual experience.

Look at the prophets: do they not declare the call of the Gentiles into the Church, saying, "In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an Ensign of the people; to it shall the *Gentiles* seek, and His rest shall be glorious[o]." The Prophet Hosea's language, though primarily applicable to the ten tribes, is certainly to be understood in reference to the Gentiles also: "I will have mercy upon her that hath not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people: and they shall say, Thou art my God[p]." And again, "It shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God[q]." But the Prophet Isaiah points directly to the Gentiles, when he says, "I am sought of them that asked not for me, I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto *a nation that was not called by my name:*" I say he points to the Gentiles there; for he immediately contrasts with them the state of his own people, saying, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts[r]." If you turn to the New Testament, you will find there the very words of our text quoted, not merely to prove that the Gentiles were to be brought into the Church of God, but *that Israel was apprised of God's intentions,* and that, however averse they were to that measure, they could not but know that Moses himself had taught them to expect it: I say, *Did not Israel know?* says the Apostle:—did they not know that "there was to be no difference between the Jew and the Greek; and that the same Lord is rich unto all that call upon him?" Yes; *for Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger*

[o] Isai. xi. 10. [p] Hos. ii. 23. [q] Hos. i. 10. with Rom. ix. 24—26.
[r] Isai. lxv. 1, 2. with Rom. x. 20, 21.

*you*[s]. If we look to matter of fact, we find that there are, in every quarter of the globe, thousands and millions of Gentiles who are serving and honouring Jehovah, precisely as Abraham himself did: they are believing in the same God, and walking in the same steps: and the only difference between him and them is, that *he* looked to that blessed seed of his who *should come;* and *they* look to that blessed seed of his who *has come,* even Jesus, in whom *all the nations of the earth are blessed.*

It is time that we now inquire,

II. What use is to be made of this prophecy by us Gentiles?

If ever there was a dispensation calculated to instruct mankind, it is that which is predicted in the words before us. I will mention three lessons in particular which it ought to teach us: and the Lord grant, that they may be engraven in all our hearts!

First, it should lead us *to adore the mysterious providence of God.* Let us take a view of God's dealings with that peculiar people, the Jews. When the whole earth was lying in gross darkness, he was pleased to choose Abraham out of an idolatrous nation and family, and to reveal himself to him. To him he promised a seed, whom he would take as a peculiar people above all the people upon earth. These descendants he promised to multiply as the stars of heaven, and as the sands upon the sea-shore; and in due time to give them the land of Canaan for their inheritance. After he had in a most wonderful manner fulfilled all his promises to them, they rebelled against *him,* and served other gods, and provoked him to bring upon them many successive troubles, and at last to send them into captivity in Babylon. But during this whole time he still consulted their best interests; and even in the last and heaviest of these judgments, "he sent them into Babylon *for their good*[t]." Afflictive as that dispensation was, it was the most profitable to them of all the

[s] Rom. x. 19. [t] Jer. xxiv. 5.

mercies and judgments that they ever experienced; for by means of it they were cured of their idolatrous propensities; and never have yielded to them any more, even to the present hour.

After seventy years God delivered them from thence also, as he had before delivered them from Egypt; and re-established them, to a certain degree, in their former prosperity. In the fulness of time, he, according to his promise, sent them his only-begotten Son, to establish among them that kingdom of righteousness and peace, which had been shadowed forth among them from the time that they became a nation. But on their destroying *him*, he determined to cast them off; and accordingly he gave them into the hands of the Romans, who executed upon them such judgments as never had been inflicted on any nation under heaven. But neither was this dispensation unmixed with mercy: for, blinded as they were by prejudice, they never would have renounced their errors, or embraced the Gospel, if they had been able still to satisfy their minds with the rites and ceremonies of their own Church. But as God drove our first parents from Paradise, and precluded them from all access to the tree of life, which was no more to be a sacramental pledge of life to them now in their fallen state; and as he thereby prevented them from deluding their souls with false hopes, and shut them up unto that mercy, which he had revealed to them through the seed of the woman; so now has he cut off the Jews from all possibility of observing the rites and ceremonies of the Mosaic law, in order that they may be constrained to seek for mercy through the Messiah whom they have crucified.

At the same time that God has ordered this dispensation with an ultimate view to the good of his once-favoured people, he has consulted in it the good of the whole world; for, when he cut them off from the stock on which they grew, he took a people from among the Gentiles, and engrafted them as scions upon the Jewish stock, and

made them "partakers of the root and fatness of the olive-tree" which his own right hand had planted. What he might have done for the Gentiles, if the Jews had not provoked him to cut them off, we cannot say: but the Apostle, speaking on this subject, says, that "they became enemies *for our sakes*," and "were broken off *that we might be graffed in*." Doubtless, the stock was sufficient to bear both them and us; for the time is coming when the whole world, Jews and Gentiles, shall grow together upon it, seeing that it is God's intention to engraff on it again the natural branches, which for the present he has broken off: but so has he ordained, that they should be cast out of his Church, and we be introduced into it, and that the one event should be preparatory to the other; that so the fall and ruin of the Jews should be the riches and salvation of the Gentile world[u]. And it is plain, that this appointment of his is carried into effect; for they are broken off, and are no longer his Church, since there is not one amongst them that either does, or can, serve God according to their law: and we, on the contrary, are his Church; and millions of us, through the world, are rendering to him the service he requires; and, if we are not his Church, then God has not at this hour, nor has he had for above seventeen hundred years, a Church upon earth. God, however, has not cast off his people fully or finally: not fully, for he brought multitudes of them into his Church in the apostolic age: nor finally; for though, through the shameful remissness of the Christian world, he has done but little for the Jews in these latter ages, yet is he, we trust, shewing mercy to them now, and sowing seeds among them, which shall one day bring forth a glorious harvest. Moreover as, by breaking off the Jews, God made room for the Gentiles, so has he ordained, that the bringing in the fulness of the Gentiles shall contribute to the restoration of the Jews themselves; and that, at last, the whole collective body

[u] Rom. xi. 11, 12, 15.

of mankind shall be "one fold under one Shepherd." What a stupendous mystery is this! Well might St. Paul, in the contemplation of it, exclaim, "O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Truly, this mystery is by no means sufficiently considered amongst us; though it is so great, that not even the Apostles themselves, for six years after the day of Pentecost, could see into it; and even then it was only by a miraculous interference that God prevailed upon them to receive it: it was by repeated visions to Peter and Cornelius, that he induced Peter to preach the Gospel to Cornelius; and it was by the effusion of the Holy Ghost on Cornelius and his family, that he induced the other Apostles to acquiesce in what Peter had done: and, even to the last, it was with reluctance they confessed, "Then hath God to the Gentiles also granted repentance unto life[x]." Let me recommend you then, my Brethren, to turn your attention to this mystery more than you have ever yet done; and never imagine that you have attained just views of it, till you are transported with wonder at the wisdom displayed in it[y], and filled with gratitude for the mercies it conveys.

A second improvement we should make of this subject is, *to be afraid of provoking God to jealousy against us also.* We have seen that it was the idolatry of the Jews that chiefly provoked God to jealousy against them. But is there not a spiritual idolatry, as well as that which consisted in the worship of graven images? and is it not equally offensive to a jealous God? When his people of old placed idols in their secret chambers, his chief complaint was, that "they set them up *in their hearts*[z]. And has he not told *us*, that "covetousness is idolatry;" and that we may "make a god of our belly?" What then is this but to say, that 'the loving and serving the creature more than the Creator,' whatever that creature be, is idolatry? We know full well, that

[x] Acts x. and xi. 1, 18. [y] Ephes. iii. 6, 9, 10. [z] Ezek. xiv. 3, 4, 7.

gods of wood and of stone were "*vanities;*" but are not pleasure, and riches, and honour, "*vanities,*" when put in competition with our God? and does not the inordinate pursuit of them provoke him to jealousy, as much as the bowing down to stocks and stones ever did? And if the rejection of Jesus by the Jews was that crime which filled up the measure of their iniquities, and brought the wrath of God upon them to the uttermost; shall not "the crucifying of the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame," as Christians do by their iniquities, be also considered as provoking the Most High God? Let us not think then that the Jews *alone* can provoke God to anger, or that they *alone* can ever be cast off for their wickedness; for he has expressly warned us by his Apostle, that he will cast *us* off, even as he did *them,* if we provoke him to jealousy by placing on the creature the affections that are due to him. Hear what St. Paul says; "Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed, lest he also spare not thee[a]." My Brethren, you cannot but see how grievously God is dishonoured by the Christian world: truly, "he is provoked by us every day;" and we, no less than the Jews, are "a rebellious and stiff-necked people." Look at all ranks and orders of men amongst us, and see whether there be not a lamentable departure from primitive Christianity? Compare the lives of the generality with the examples of Christ and his Apostles, and see, not merely how short they come of the pattern set before them, (for *that* the best amongst us do,) but how opposite they are in their conduct; insomuch that, if they did not *call themselves* Christians, no one would ever think of calling them so, from their lives. Those who are in earnest about the salvation of their souls, are still "as men wondered at" amongst us; so that instead of pointing at an unhappy few as exceptions to the Christian character, no one can tread in the steps of Christ and his Apostles, without becoming "a sign and a wonder" among his neigh-

[a] Rom. xi. 21.

bours. This you cannot but know: what then must we expect, but that God will punish *us* precisely as he has done the Jews, and provoke us to jealousy, by others whom we despise? The fact is, that God is already dealing with us in this manner. The rich, the great, the noble are, for the most part, so occupied with "vanities," as to forget the services which they owe to God; and the consequence is, that God overlooks them, and transfers the blessings of his Gospel to the poor. At this day it is true, no less than in the days of the Apostles, that "not many rich, not many mighty, not many noble are called," but "God has chosen the weak, and base, and foolish things of the world; yea, and *things which are not*, to bring to nought *things which are;* that no flesh should glory in his presence:" and this very circumstance does move the rich to anger, precisely as it did in the days of old; "Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? As for these poor contemptible people that make such a noise about religion, they are cursed." But I must go further, and say, that God is dealing in this very way even with those who do profess themselves his peculiar people. Who are the happy Christians? Who have the richest enjoyment of the Gospel, or most adorn it in their life and conversation? Are they the richer professors, whose hearts are set on "vanities," or who are labouring night and day to procure them? Are they not rather the poor and the destitute, who, having but little of this world, are more anxious to enjoy their God? We say not indeed that this is universally the case; but it is a general truth: nay more, amongst Indians and Hottentots there is often found a more lively and realizing sense of the divine presence, than amongst the worldly-minded professors of our own day. I must entreat you therefore, Brethren, to reflect, that if we do not, as a people, turn more heartily unto the Lord, we have reason to fear, lest "the candlestick should be removed from us," and be transferred to a people who shall walk more worthy of it.

Lastly, we should be stirred up by this subject *to concur with God in his gracious intentions towards the Jews.* In the song before us, there are repeated intimations that God will once more restore to his favour his now degenerate and afflicted people. In verse 36, it is said, "The Lord will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left." And the song concludes with these remarkable words, "Rejoice, O ye nations! with his people: for he will avenge the blood of his servants, and will render vengeance to his adversaries, and *will be merciful unto his land, and unto his people.*" Here then, you see, that there is mercy in reserve for the Jewish people, and that the Gentiles also shall be partakers of their joy. But in our text there is a hint of a very peculiar nature, namely, not merely that God will vouchsafe mercy to them, *in the midst of* their present chastisement, but that *he will render those very chastisements subservient to his gracious designs.* He intimates that he is even now provoking them to jealousy, by the mercies he bestows on *us;* that is, that he is even now endeavouring to inflame them with a holy desire to regain his favour. It is precisely in this sense that St. Paul uses the same expression: indeed, St. Paul tells us, that he himself used *the very same means* for *the same end:* "Through the fall of the Jews (says he) is salvation come to the Gentiles, to *provoke them to jealousy.* Now I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the Apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office; if by any means I *may provoke to jealousy* (it is the same word as before[b]) them which are my flesh, and might save some of them." This then is the work in which we are to co-operate with God: and, truly, if we were all in earnest about it, we might, with God's help, do great things. They behold us professing ourselves to be the peculiar people of God: and, if they saw so great a difference between themselves and us as they ought to see, truly they

[b] Παραζηλώσω, Rom. xi. 11, 14.

would begin to envy us, and to wish to be partakers of our blessings. But, if they see that we are as covetous and worldly-minded, as lewd and sensual, as proud and vindictive, and, in short, as corrupt in all respects as the very heathen, shall we not prove a stumbling-block, rather than an help, to them? And what if, whilst we ought all to be uniting with one heart and one soul in the blessed work of leading them to Christ, they should find amongst us an utter indifference to their salvation? Yea, what if they behold amongst us some (some too of whom we might hope better things) to whom the exertions of their brethren are rather a matter of offence than of joy; some whose endeavour is rather to frustrate, than advance, our benevolent labours? What if they behold some who, instead of labouring with us to provoke *them* to jealousy, are themselves provoked to an ungodly jealousy against *us*, on account of our exertions; and who, like Tobiah and Sanballat of old, "are grieved that we have undertaken to seek the welfare of Israel[c]?" Will not our Jewish brethren take advantage of this? Will they not impute this to our religion? If they see us thus worldly, or thus malignant, will they not judge of our principles by our practice; and, instead of envying us our privileges and attainments, will they not be ready to glory over us, and to thank God they are not Christians? Oh, Brethren! we little think what guilt we contract, while practising such abominations. It is said of many, that they are no person's enemy but their own: but this is not true; they are enemies to all around them, whom they vitiate by their example; they are enemies to the Jews, whom they harden in their infidelity; and they are enemies to the heathen, whom they teach to abhor the Christian name. But let it not be so amongst us; let us remember that to us is committed the blessed task of bringing back to God's fold his wandering, yet beloved, people. Nor let us despair of success; "for, if we were cut out of the olive-tree which is wild by nature, and

[c] Neh. ii. 10.

were graffed contrary to nature into a good olive-tree; how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be graffed into their own olive-tree? If they abide not in unbelief, they *shall* be graffed in; for, though *we* are unable, *God* is able to graff them in again[d]." But then, how is this to be accomplished? it is to be by our means; ("as for the times and the seasons, we say nothing; God has reserved them in his own power:") God has appointed us to seek the salvation of his people; and has communicated his blessings to us *on purpose that we may be* his depository to keep them, and his channel to convey them, for their benefit. Hear his own words: "As ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief; even so have these also now not believed, that *through your mercy they also may obtain mercy*[e]." Let us then address ourselves to the blessed work that God has assigned us. Let us, as God's chosen instruments, endeavour to interest ourselves with *him* to reinstate them in his favour, and interest ourselves with *them* to return unto him. Let us make a conscience of praying for them in secret; let us devise plans for furthering the communication of divine knowledge amongst them; let us not shrink from labour, or trouble, or expense; let us not be deterred by any difficulties, or discouraged by any disappointments: but let us labour for them, as their forefathers did for us; let us tread in the steps of the holy Apostles, and be ready to sacrifice time, and interest, and liberty, and life itself, in their service; and account the saving of their souls the richest recompence that God himself can give us. And, that we may the more effectually provoke them to jealousy, let us shew them that God has done for us as much as he ever did for the patriarchs of old, giving us as intimate an access to him, as firm a confidence in him, and as assured prospects of an everlasting acceptance with him, as ever Abraham himself enjoyed. They are apt to

[d] Rom. xi. 23, 24. [e] Rom. xi. 30, 31

think that, in exalting Jesus, we dishonour Jehovah: but let us shew them by our lives, that we render to Jehovah all the love, and honour, and service, that were ever rendered to him by his most eminent saints; and that there is no principle whatever so operative and powerful as the love of our adorable Redeemer. Let us shew them, that communion with the Son has the same effect on us, that communion with the Father had on Moses; that it assimilates us unto God, and constrains all who behold us to acknowledge, that we have been with God. Their eyes are now upon us; upon *us* especially, who are endeavouring to convert them to the faith of Christ: let them therefore see in *us* the influence of Christian principles: let them see that, whilst we speak of enjoying peace through the blood of our great Sacrifice, and of having the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and Sanctifier, we live as none others can live, exhibiting in our conduct the faith of Abraham, the meekness of Moses, the patience of Job, the piety of David, and the fidelity of Daniel: in a word, let them see in us an assemblage of all the brightest virtues of their most renowned progenitors. O! would to God that there were in all of us such a heart! Would to God that the Holy Spirit might be poured out upon us for this end, and work in us so effectually, that the very sight of us should be sufficient to carry conviction to their minds; that so our Jewish brethren, beholding "the exceeding grace of God in us," might be constrained to take hold of our skirt, and say, "We will go with you, for we perceive that God is with you of a truth[r]!"

[r] Zech. viii. 23.

## CCXXXIV.

### THE EXCELLENCY OF JEHOVAH.

Deut. xxxii. 31. *Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.*

IT is not a little to the honour of those who serve God, that the more fully their principles are inves-

tigated, the more just will they appear, and worthy to be adopted by all the world. Those embraced by ungodly men are often such as scarcely to be vindicated by their most partial friends: but those, which the children of God profess, will stand the test of examination from their bitterest enemies. To this effect Moses speaks in the words before us; from which we shall,

I. Point out the superiority of Jehovah above all other objects of confidence—

Neither the idols of heathens, nor any other objects of confidence, can in any point of view be put in competition with Jehovah. Consider

His power—

[There is not any thing which he is not able to effect; "He doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." But what created being can claim this prerogative?]

His love—

[Incomprehensible are the heights and depths of the Father's love, discovered in sending his own Son to die for us; nor less the love of Christ in giving himself a sacrifice for our sins. Is there any other Being that ever has expressed, or ever can, such love as this?]

His faithfulness—

[God has given to us exceeding great and precious promises, suited to every want we can possibly experience. And has one jot or tittle of his word ever failed? But where shall we find a creature that has not, in some respect or other, disappointed the expectations of those who trusted in him?]

So indisputable is the point before us, that we may even,

II. Appeal to the very enemies of Jehovah in confirmation of our assertions—

We might with propriety appeal to his *friends*, since they, by their knowledge of him, and their experience of the vanity of earthly confidences, are best qualified to judge. But, waving this just advantage, we will appeal,

1. To his enemies of former times—

[In the contest with the worshippers of Baal, this matter was brought to a trial: and what was the result? the very idolaters themselves exclaimed, "The Lord, He is God! The Lord, He is God[a]!" Nebuchadnezzar was in like manner forced to acknowledge the vanity of the idol he had set up, and to confess that no other god could effect such a deliverance for his votaries, as Jehovah had wrought for the Hebrew Youths[b].]

2. To his enemies at this day—

[There are many who are ready to think that too much honour is ascribed to God, when the weakness of all created confidences is exposed. But we will appeal to *their judgment*, whether they do not think that an omniscient, and omnipotent Being, whose providence and grace have been so marvellously displayed, be not more worthy of our trust than an arm of flesh? We appeal also to *their experience;* for though, through their ignorance of Jehovah, they cannot declare what HE is, they do know, and must confess, that the creature, when confided in as a source of true happiness, invariably shews itself to be "vanity and vexation of spirit."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let those who have undervalued our Rock, repent of their folly—

[Not idolaters alone, but all, who do not supremely love and adore the Saviour, must be considered as undervaluing this our Rock: and, if they do not repent of their conduct now, they will bewail it ere long with endless and unavailing sorrow. Let them then consider, that, with respect to *temporal* things, there is none other that can deliver them from trouble, or support them under it: and that, with respect to *spiritual* things, there is no wisdom, strength, or righteousness, but in Him alone. Let them consider, that "in him all fulness dwells;" and that, if they trust in him, he will give them all that is needful for body and soul, for time and eternity. O that they were wise and would turn unto him, and cleave to him with full purpose of heart!]

2. Let those, who trust in Jesus, glory in him as an all-sufficient portion—

[They who build on this Rock need never fear: however high their expectations are raised, they shall never be disappointed of their hope. They may enlarge their desires, even as hell itself that is never satisfied; they may ask all that God himself can bestow; and, provided it be good for them, they shall possess it all: however "wide they open their mouth, God will

[a] 1 Kings xviii. 39. [b] Dan. iii. 29.

fill it." In vain shall either men or devils seek to injure them; for "one of them should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight[c]." Let them then consider what an almighty Friend they have; and endeavour to walk worthy of Him who has called them to his kingdom and glory."]

[c] ver. 30.

## CCXXXV.

### JUDGMENT NEAR AT HAND.

Deut. xxxii. 34, 35. *Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures? To me belongeth vengeance and recompence: their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.*

TENDERNESS and fidelity are by no means incompatible. Nothing could exceed the tenderness of our blessed Lord, who wept over those who were just about to imbrue their hands in his blood. Yet, when occasion called for it, he spoke with great severity: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell[a]?" In like manner, Jehovah, in the chapter before us, whilst he declares that "a fire was kindled in his anger against his people, and that it should burn to the lowest hell[b]," takes up this lamentation over them: "O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up? For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges[c]." But as, notwithstanding all his remonstrances, they still continued to bring forth nothing but "grapes of gall and clusters of Gomorrha," he warns them, that their iniquities were remembered by him in order to a future judgment, and that their merited calamities were near at hand.

But to us, also, are the words no less applicable than to them: for we, also, are a disobedient people,

[a] Matt. xxiii. 33. [b] ver. 22. [c] ver. 29—31.

and have but too much reason to expect the judgments of God upon us. I observe, then,

I. That our sins are treasured up before God in order to a future judgment—

[This is stated to us in way of appeal: "Is not your iniquity laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures?" We cannot doubt but that God notes all our wickedness, and "records it in the book of his remembrance[d]." Of this Job was well convinced, when he said, "My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity[e]." And oh! what a mass of iniquity is there contained! Call to mind the sins of early infancy: for not one of *them* is overlooked by God. Then view the evils of childhood and of youth: alas, how numerous! even as the sands upon the sea-shore for multitude. Then go on to the period of maturer age, when, instead of improving our enlarged faculties in the service of our God, we have debased them the more in the service of sin and Satan. Go on to the present hour. Take all the actions, words, and thoughts of every successive day, and try them by the standard of God's holy Law; and then see what loads of guilt we have contracted, and what volumes of indictment are ready at any hour to be brought forth against us: especially if we bear in remembrance our *impenitence*, which so greatly provokes God to anger; and our *contempt of his Gospel*, that stupendous effort of his love and mercy for the saving of our souls from death: if we reflect on these, I say, we cannot but see what a fearful account we have to give to our offended God. How soon we shall have "filled up the measure of our iniquities," God alone knows: but this accumulation of our guilt none of us can deny; and this certainty of retribution none of us can doubt.]

In addition to this, I must say,

II. That the appointed time for giving up our account is hastening on apace—

["Our foot," we are told, "shall slide in due time, and the day of our calamity is at hand." Truly "we are set in slippery places; and are liable to be cast down into destruction in a moment[f]." Persons walking upon the ice, or on the glaciers of mountainous countries, feel the force of this observation, and endeavour to guard with all possible care against their danger. But we see not our danger, notwithstanding it is in fact not less imminent than theirs. Millions of dangers encompass us around; and numerous instances occur of persons summoned into eternity without a moment's warning. The

[d] Mal. iii. 16. [e] Job xiv. 17. [f] Ps. lxxiii. 18, 19.

time for every man's departure is fixed by God: and how near it may be at hand, no one can divine. But the instant it is arrived, whether we be prepared or unprepared, away we are hurried to the judgment-seat of Christ; and, if unprepared, we are cast into the very depths of hell. I know that persons are ready to say, "But God is merciful." True; but I answer, that "To him belongeth vengeance also;" yea, and this is as essential to his character as mercy. Hence, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, my text is cited with peculiar emphasis: "*We know him that hath said,* Vengeance belongeth unto me: I will recompense, saith the Lord." And to this it is added, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God[g]." Now, I ask, Shall this perfection of the Deity be dispensed with, in order to give us safety in our sins? It cannot be. An hatred of sin, and a determination to punish it, are essential to the nature of Jehovah; and he can as soon cease to exist, as he can cease to act worthy of his proper character. You cannot but know, Brethren, that multitudes are hurried daily into the presence of their God, without any regard to their state of preparation to meet him: and there is no reason why *you* should not be taken just as they were. "They were saying, Peace and safety; and then came sudden destruction upon them, as travail upon a woman with child[h]." And the more secure you are in your own apprehension, the more reason there is to fear that you shall be called away in like manner, and that "that awful day shall overtake you as a thief[i]." This consideration is very particularly urged upon you by the Prophet Hosea: "The iniquity of Ephraim *is bound up; his sin is hid.* The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him[k]." It matters not whether you be young or old, or whether in health or sickness, "the Judge standeth at the door;" and at the instant ordained by him, into his presence must you go, to "give an account of all that you have ever done, whether it be good or evil."]

And truth compels me to declare,

III. That it is owing to the forbearance of God alone that every one of us has not long since fallen into hell—

[Who amongst us has not deserved the wrath of God? Who amongst us may not call to mind some moment, when God, so to speak, might have cut us off to advantage, to display in us his righteous indignation? And if he had summoned us hence, who could have withstood his mandate, or prolonged

[g] Heb. x. 30, 31.
[h] 1 Thess. v. 3.
[i] 1 Thess. v. 4.
[k] Hos. xiii. 12, 13.

his life one single hour? We have been in the hands of God, hanging, as it were, over the bottomless pit, and suspended only by a single thread, which, if let loose or cut, would have transmitted us at once to everlasting misery. And many times has God been tempted, so to speak, to let go his hold: but our blessed Saviour has interceded for us, and prevailed to obtain for us a respite from our destined misery, if by any means we might be led to avert it by penitence and faith in him. All has been ready for our ruin long ago. "Tophet has been prepared: it has been made deep and large: the pile thereof is fire and much wood; and the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, hath kindled it[l]:" yes, the unquenchable fire has long since been kindled, and those cruel spirits, who have been our tempters, have long been waiting to become our tormentors. Nothing has prevented our ruin but the forbearance of our God, who, in the midst of all our provocations, has yet waited to be gracious unto us. It is to his sovereign grace alone we owe it, that we are not at this instant in the condition of millions, who never lived so long as we, or sinned so much against God as we, and were altogether as likely to live as we. But "others have been taken, and we are left," if peradventure we may yet repent us of our sins, and flee for refuge to the hope that is set before us.]

## I cannot conclude this awful subject without ADDRESSING a few words,

### 1. To those who are yet indulging in security—

[What have you been doing all your days, but "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath[m]?" You do not *design* to go to hell, I know: neither did they who are already there. They *designed*, each in his own way, to do something that might bring them to heaven. One intended to repent, another to amend, another perhaps to embrace the Gospel. But death seized them, ere they had found leisure to carry their designs into effect. And you also *design* to get into the way that leads to heaven. But tell me, When did you form this design? You know not the time when it did not in a careless way float upon your mind: and here have you been, years and years, without ever carrying it into effect. Tell me, then, I pray you, when do you intend to carry it into effect? As to any serious purpose and endeavour, it is still as far off as at any period of your lives: and therefore there is reason to fear that your good designs will terminate, as those of millions do, in utter abortion: and that in you will be verified what the Psalmist has said, "Upon the wicked, God will rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of

[l] Isai. xxx. 33. [m] Rom. ii. 5.

their cup[n]." You may be assured, that God will not always bear with you: that, on the contrary, "your judgment lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not[o]." "The axe at this very moment lieth at the root of the tree," ready to cut you down[p]: and God alone knows whether another offer of mercy shall be ever made you. "O that you may know, every one of you, *in this your day*, the things that belong unto your peace[q]!" "To-day, Brethren, while it is called to-day, harden not your hearts:" but "seek ye the Lord *while he may be found*, and call upon him *while he is near*[r]." "This day, for every one of you, *may be* the day of salvation[s]:" what to-morrow may be none can tell. I pray God, it may not prove to you, as no doubt it will to many, "the day of wrath," the day of everlasting damnation.]

2. To those who are desirous of preparing for death and judgment—

[Happy am I to declare unto you, that, however numerous or heinous your sins may have been, they may all this very day be "blotted out of the book of God's remembrance;" yea, be "blotted out as a morning cloud[t]," never more to be seen, never to be remembered against you in judgment[u]. "The blood of Jesus Christ, we are told, will cleanse from *all* sin[x];" so that "though your sins have been as scarlet or as crimson, they shall in one instant become white as snow[y]." Yes, Brethren, if "vengeance belongeth unto God," so does mercy also: "with him is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption, so that he will redeem Israel from all his sins[z]." Take courage, then; and from the very forbearance you have experienced, assure yourselves that "God is full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great kindness;" and that if only you come to him in his Son's name, you shall never perish, but shall have eternal life.]

[n] Ps. xi. 6. [o] 2 Pet. ii. 3. [p] Luke iii. 9.
[q] Luke xix. 42. [r] Isai. lv. 6. [s] 2 Cor. vi. 2.
[t] Isai. xliii. 25. [u] Heb. viii. 12. [x] 1 John i. 7.
[y] Isai. i. 18. [z] Ps. cxxx. 7, 8.

## CCXXXVI.

### OUR EXTREMITY IS GOD'S OPPORTUNITY.

Deut. xxxii. 36. *The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left.*

IT is a certain truth that God is immutable in his purposes, whether of judgment or of mercy. In the

execution of either there may be long delays: but neither the one nor the other shall fail. The sins of the impenitent "are laid up in store with him, and sealed up among his treasures:" and how secure soever the ungodly may imagine themselves, they shall give up their account to him, "to whom belongeth vengeance and recompence:" yes, they may stand fast in their own apprehension; but "their feet shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand; and the things that shall come upon them make haste[a];" or, to use the energetic language of St. Peter, "their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not[b]." In like manner are mercies reserved for his chosen people: and though he may, for wise and gracious purposes, suffer them to be reduced to the greatest extremities, as he did his people in Babylon[c], yet will he interpose effectually for them in due season, "repenting himself for them, when he sees that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left."

In confirmation of this truth I propose to shew,

I. To what a state God's people may be reduced—

God's ways and thoughts are far different from ours. We should be ready to suppose that he would preserve his people from any great calamities, and interpose for their deliverance at the very commencement of their trials. But this is not the way in which he proceeds. He permits his people to be severely tried,

1. By temporal afflictions—

[To these is the primary reference in the text[d] — — — And the whole of God's dispensations towards his people, in Egypt and the wilderness, evince the truth of it. Nor is it the wicked only whom he permits to be visited with severe afflictions: the righteous in every age have drunk deep of the cup of sorrow which has been put into their hands[e]: God has seen it "needful that they should be in heaviness through manifold temptations[f];"

[a] ver. 34, 35. [b] 2 Pet. ii. 3. [c] See Mic. iv. 10.
[d] Compare Judg. ii. 14, 15, 18. with 2 Kings xiv. 26.
[e] Heb. xi. 37, 38. Acts viii. 3, 4. [f] 1 Pet. i. 6.

and has taught them to regard their lot, not as a mark of his displeasure, but rather as a token of his love[g].]

2. By spiritual trouble—

[Many, previous to their finding peace with God, are brought into the deepest distress on account of their iniquities, and from an apprehension of God's heavy displeasure[h]——— And many too after that they have obtained mercy, may yet be greatly tried by reason of the hidings of God's face[i], and the delays of his promised blessings[k]——— Greater distress than this cannot be imagined; yet was it the lot of him who was "the man after God's own heart."]

But let us contemplate,

II. The seasonable interpositions which they may hope for—

"God will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants," when he sees them reduced to such a state as this.

He has done this in instances without number—

[The whole history of the Bible is replete with instances: yea, on numberless occasions have his interpositions been so signal, that his most inveterate enemies have been constrained to acknowledge his hand, and his most unbelieving people to sing his praise. The hundred and seventh Psalm is in fact an epitome of God's dealings with his people from the beginning of the world to this present moment——— And there is not any one amongst ourselves, who, if he have been at all observant of the ways of Providence, must not acknowledge, that he has both seen in others, and experienced in himself, many merciful interpositions in the hour of need.]

He will do it to the end of time—

[The words before us are in the form of a promise: and we may rely upon them as sure and faithful. They shall be fulfilled to us under temporal distresses[l]——— and under spiritual trouble also will God surely remember them for our good. Where can we find a more disconsolate state than that depicted by the Prophet Isaiah? Yet sooner will God work for us the most stupendous miracles than leave us destitute of the desired aid[m]———]

The frequency of such interpositions leads me to point out,

[g] Heb. xii. 6. [h] Ps. vi. 1—7. and xxxviii. 1—8.
[i] Ps. xxii. 1, 2. and xlii. 6, 7.
[k] Ps. lxxvii. 1—9. and lxxxviii. 14—16. and cii. 1—11.
[l] Ps. xxxiii. 18, 19. [m] Isai. xli. 17, 18.

III. The reason why God permits such crises previous to the bestowment of his promised blessings—

Amongst many other reasons, he does it,

1. For the making of us more sensible of our dependence upon him—

[Whilst, in theory, we acknowledge God as "the Author and Giver of all good," there is no sentiment further from our minds than this in practice. It is only in straits and difficulties that we think of looking unto God. But such atheism is most displeasing to the Governor of the universe: and on this account he suffers us to fall into divers temptations, that we may know from whence all our blessings have flowed, and on whose providence we depend. St. Paul assigns this as one very important reason why God permitted such trials to come upon him in Asia, that he was driven to utter despair: "We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us[n]." And every affliction that brings us to a more simple life of faith on God, we may justly welcome as a blessing in disguise.]

2. For the magnifying the more his own glorious perfections—

[We scarcely notice God at all in his common mercies: it is only when we are delivered by some signal interposition of his providence or grace, that we become sensible of our obligations to him. Then we say, The Lord hath done this: and we feel disposed, for a time at least, to give him the glory due unto his name. It was for this reason that Jesus came not to restore Lazarus, till he had been dead four days[o]. Under such circumstances we admire his goodness, and adore his love; and confess him to be a faithful God, who has never failed in the execution of any promise to his believing people. The song of Moses is sung by us again: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders[p]?" Conviction flashes on our minds with tenfold energy; and we exclaim with the convinced worshippers of Baal, "The Lord, he is the God! the Lord, he is the God!"]

3. For the rendering of his mercies more influential on our minds—

[n] 2 Cor. i. 8—10. [o] John xi. 4, 6, 15, 40. [p] Exod. xv. 11.

[When God's mercies have been heaped upon us in an unusual degree, then we feel disposed to ask, "What shall I render to the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?" Behold David after some great deliverance, whereby "his soul was brought out of a horrible pit, and set, as it were, upon a rock;" "what songs were put into his mouth;" and with what ardour does he exclaim, "Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust[q]!" St. Paul had been brought to similar distress by reason of the thorn in his flesh: yet, when once assured that "the grace of Christ should be sufficient for him," how does he immediately take pleasure and glory in all that he either did or could endure[r]! And thus will it be with all, in proportion as they are sensible of the mercies conferred upon them: they will present their whole selves a living sacrifice unto their God, as a reasonable and delightful service[s].]

ADDRESS—

1. To those who are under any temporal affliction—

[Say not, that "the Lord has forsaken and forgotten you[t]:" but wait his leisure, and assure yourselves that "all is working for your good." It was by a circuitous path that he led Israel to the promised land: but "he led them by the right way:" and you also shall see, in due season, that though "clouds and darkness have been round about him, righteousness and judgment have been the basis of his throne."]

2. To those whose trials are of a spiritual nature—

[These are the heavier of the two: for "a wounded spirit who can bear?" But "light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." Only wait the appointed time, and "the vision shall come, and not tarry[u]." "In the evening time it shall be light[x]." In the mean while follow the direction which the Lord himself gives you; and, whilst "walking in darkness and without light, trust in the Lord, and stay yourselves upon your God[y]."]

[q] Ps. xl. 1—4. [r] 2 Cor. xii. 7—10. [s] Rom. xii. 1.
[t] Isai. xlix. 14. [u] Hab. iii. 2. [x] Zech. xiv. 7.
[y] Isai. l. 10.

## CCXXXVII.

### GOD THE ONLY AUTHOR OF GOOD AND EVIL.

Deut. xxxii. 39. *See now, that I, even I, am he, and there is no strange god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.*

THE Jews, from the time that they became a nation, turned aside from the living God to the worship

of idols: on which account, God, in righteous indignation, refused them, on some occasions, the aid which he alone could bestow; and referred them to their idols, in whom they trusted, that they might obtain from them those things of which they stood in need: "Where are their gods, their rock in whom they trusted, which did eat the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink-offerings? Let them rise up and help you, and be your protection." But to us is the same reproach most justly due: for though we do not, like them, bow down to stocks and stones, we are far from realizing in our minds the exclusive agency of Jehovah. To us, therefore, no less than to them, may be addressed the solemn admonition before us; "See now, that I, even I, am he, and there is no strange god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand."

Let me now entreat your attention to,

I. God's own description of his own character—

Agreeably to what is here spoken, we see, that,

1. His agency is universal—

[There is not any thing done, whether it be good or evil, but he is the doer of it. "I am the Lord," says he; "and there is none else; there is no God besides me. I am the Lord; and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things[a]." There is nothing so great, or so small, but it must be traced to him as its proper source and author, even to the falling of a sparrow, or the falling of a hair from our heads[b]. And God is desirous that this should be known and duly considered by us. To discover this to his ancient people, was one great reason for his marvellous interpositions for them[c], and of the no less marvellous forbearance which he exercised towards them[d]. And we, also, must bear in mind, that "whether he kill or make alive, whether he wound or heal, it is He alone that does it, and there is no strange god with him."]

2. His appointments are sovereign—

[a] Isai. xlv. 5—7. with Amos iii. 6.
[b] Matt. x. 29, 30.
[c] Deut. iv. 34, 35.
[d] ver. 27.

[The whole Scripture bears testimony that "God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." He does so in relation to all temporal matters: "He killeth, and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up: he maketh poor and maketh rich; he bringeth low and lifteth up: he raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit a throne of glory[e]." In relation to spiritual matters, also, he exercises no less a sovereign control, "having mercy on whom he will have mercy, and hardening whom he sees good to harden[f]." This was viewed by St. Paul in so important a light, that when he had once touched upon it, he did not know how to relinquish the subject, but insisted on it with every diversity of expression that language could furnish, and yet with such repetitions as appeared almost to be endless. Having said that God had blessed us with all spiritual blessings, he traces the gift to this as its true source: "*He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world,* having *predestinated us* to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, *according to the good pleasure of his will,* to the *praise of the glory of his grace,* wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, *according to the riches of his grace;* wherein he hath *abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence;* having made known unto us *the mystery of his will,* according to *his good pleasure,* which he had *purposed in himself;* that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him; in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being *predestinated* according to *the purpose of him* who *worketh all things after the counsel of his own will,* that we should be *to the praise of his glory*[g]." We have often read this passage, but with so little care, as scarcely to get a glimpse of its true import: but, the more minutely and attentively we consider it, the more shall we see the amazing importance of the subject contained in it, and of the character of God as a mighty Sovereign, that does what he will, and "gives not account to us of any of his matters[h]."]

3. His power is uncontrollable—

[Forcible is that appeal of Elihu, "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation or a man only[i]." He is a mighty "Lawgiver, alike able to save or to destroy[k]." Hear Jehovah's own declaration

[e] 1 Sam. ii. 6—8. [f] Rom. ix. 18.
[g] Eph. i. 3—12. and again in ver. 14.
[h] Job xxxiii. 13. [i] Job xxxiv. 29. [k] Jam. iv. 12.

ve been tried in one way, and others in another; some for a ıger, and others for a shorter period; some in mind——— me in body——— some in estate——— Even those who ve been most favoured in this respect, have found abundant ason to acknowledge, that "this is not our rest." To the ung and inexperienced, the world appears a garden abound- ; with delights: but on a fuller acquaintance with it we find, at its roses have their thorns; and even its choicest delicacies :en prove occasions of the sorest pain. "Man is born to )uble, as the sparks fly upward."]

As, from our general notions of God's goodness, e might have expected that his dealings with his :ople would have been different from what we find em to be, let us inquire into,

. His end and design in them—

The reasons here assigned for his dispensations wards the Jews, will afford us a clew for discover- ; his intentions towards ourselves. He diversifies ; dispensations towards us,

1. To humble us—

[Were our mercies altogether unmixed, we should know hing of the effect of judgments on the rebellious will of ı: and if there were no intermission of adversity, we should strangers to the effect of prosperity upon the carnal heart: by the variety of states which we pass through, we are led ee the total depravity of our nature; since we can be in no e whatever, wherein the mind does not shew itself alienated ı God, and averse to bear his yoke. We are apt to think a change of circumstances would produce in us a change nduct: but, as a person in a fever finds no posture easy, nor food pleasant to his taste, so we, through the corruption of ıearts, find all situations alike unproductive of a permanent ge in our dispositions towards God. "We are bent to slide from him, even as a broken bow;" and every change uation only serves to establish that melancholy truth, that heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately d." To convince us of this is the first work of God upon )ul[d], and the first object of all his dispensations."]

To prove us—

It is easy to obey God at some times and in some respects, nparison of what it is at other times and in other respects. herefore puts us into a variety of situations, to try whether

[d] John xvi. 8.

we will make him the supreme object of our regard in all. At some times he gives health, and affluence, and honour, to see whether we will suffer these things to draw away our hearts from him, or whether we will improve them all for him. At other times he lays affliction upon our loins, to see whether we will retain our love to him, and bless him as well when he takes away as when he gives. At some times he permits us to be sorely tempted by Satan, and by the corrupt propensities of our own hearts, to prove whether we will prefer the maintenance of a good conscience to any of the gratifications of sense. At other times he permits persecution to rage against us, that it may appear whether we will sacrifice our interests, and life itself, for him. In fact, every change of circumstance is sent by him, precisely as the command respecting the sacrificing of Isaac was sent to Abraham: by that command "God tempted him;" and by every circumstance of life he tempts us, to "prove whether we will obey his commandments or no."[e]

### 3. To instruct us—

[We are apt to imagine that the happiness of man is greatly dependent upon earthly prosperity: and that the loss of temporal comforts is an irreparable evil. But God would teach us, that this is altogether a mistake. By loading us with all that this world can give, he shews us how insufficient earthly things are to make us happy: and, by reducing us to a state of want, or pain, or trouble of any kind, he leads us to himself, and then shews us how happy he can make us, though under circumstances the most painful to flesh and blood. This is a great and valuable lesson; most honourable to him, most beneficial to us: it elevates us completely above this lower world; and, in proportion as it is learned, enables us to live on God alone. When Satan tempted our Lord to distrust his heavenly Father's care, and to "command the stones to be made bread," our Lord reminded him of the lesson which was here recorded for the good of the Church; namely, that it was the blessing of God upon bread, and not the bread itself, that could do us good; and that that blessing would as easily produce the effect without means as with them. Thus he teaches us that, in having God, we have ALL; and that, without him, we have *nothing*.]

### 4. To do us good at our latter end—

[If our state were never diversified, we *should have but* one set of graces called forth into action: *but, by experiencing* alterations and reverses, we are *led to exercise every kind of* grace: and by this means we grow *in every part, just as the* members of the body grow, when *all are duly exercised*[f].

[e] ver. 16. [f] *Col. ii. 19. 1 Pet. ii. 2.*

respecting this: "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour. Before the day was, I am he; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work; and who shall let it[l]?" Does he meditate vengeance? this is his own awful asseveration, in the words immediately following my text: "I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh[m]." On the other hand, does he contemplate the exercise of mercy? this is the assurance that he gives his people: "I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee. Fear not, *thou worm* Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing-instrument, having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them: and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel[n]." In a word, He is a Potter, and we are the clay; and whether he is pleased to make, or mar, the vessel, none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou[o]?]

Let us now proceed to notice,

II. His solemn call to the consideration of it—

"See now," says he, "that this is my unquestionable, and unchangeable character:" and you are called to contemplate it,

1. That you may give him the glory of all that you have received—

[My Brethren, God is a holy and a jealous God: "his very name is, Jealous[p];" and "his glory he will not give to another[q]." How fearfully he will resent any interference with him in this respect, may be seen in the case of Herod, who, when he was applauded for his eloquence, gave not God the glory; and God, in righteous displeasure, caused him to be "eaten up of worms, till he gave up the ghost[r]." But more especially is God jealous in relation to spiritual blessings, which must be ascribed to him alone. Indeed, he has so constituted the whole work of man's salvation, that no particle of honour should be assumed by man, but all glory should be

[l] Isai. xliii. 11, 13. [m] ver. 40—42.
[n] Isai. xli. 13—16. [o] Jer. xviii. 3—6. with Rom. ix. 20, 21.
[p] Exod. xxxiv. 14. [q] Isai. xlii. 8. [r] Acts xii. 21—23.

given to him, as "the author and the finisher of our faith." "He has treasured up for us every thing in Christ Jesus[s];" and ordained, that we should "receive every thing out of his fulness[t]," looking to him as our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our complete redemption, "that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that all should glory in him alone[u]." Let this lesson, then, be learned by us, that God may receive from us all the glory of all that we possess; since "if we differ from others in any respect, it is he who has made us to differ; and we possess nothing which we have not gratuitously received from him[x]."]

2. That you may depend on him for all that you ever hope to receive—

[Here, also, God asserts his claim to our entire dependence: "Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and that maketh flesh his arm; and whose heart departeth from the Lord his God[y]." Especially in reference to every thing that concerns our salvation, does God require our undivided affiance: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth! for I am God; and there is none else[z]." Every child of man, whatever he may possess, must rely on Christ alone, saying, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." "In the Lord alone shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory[a]." To this has God a very especial respect in the words of my text. If we look to the creature, or place any dependence on an arm of flesh, we must take the consequences[b]. The creature "cannot do good, or do evil." As to the idols on which the Jews were disposed to place their confidence, God says to them, "Ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you[c]." So must it be said of every thing on which *we* are wont to rely; "It is a broken reed, which will only pierce the hand that resteth on it[d]." Trust ye, then, in the Lord, and in him alone: yea, "trust in him for ever: for with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength[e]."]

This subject, methinks, speaks,

1. Comfort to the true Christian—

[Respecting this glorious Being who is here described, it is your privilege to say, that "he is your God." In truth, whatever you want, he describes himself as a God of that very thing, of "love," of "mercy," of "peace," of "strength," of

[s] Col. i. 19. [t] John i. 16. [u] 1 Cor. i. 29—31.
[x] 1 Cor. iv. 7. [y] Jer. xvii. 5—8. [z] Isai. xlv. 22.
[a] Isai. xlv. 24, 25. [b] ver. 37, 38, 39. [c] Isai. xli. 23, 24.
[d] 2 Kings xviii. 21. [e] Isai. xxvi. 4.

"comfort," of "all grace;" and in relation to that very thing will he "be a God unto you[f]." Seek him, then, in Christ Jesus; and glory in him as "your God and portion for ever."]

2. Terror to those who have any other god—

[Who is that God that shall save you in the hour of your extremity? or, Where will ye flee for succour in the day of judgment? Indeed, indeed, there is no refuge for you, but in Christ; nor "any other name given under heaven but his, whereby you can be saved[g]."]

[f] Heb. viii. 10. [g] Acts iv. 12.

## CCXXXVIII.

### A MINISTER'S DYING CHARGE TO HIS PEOPLE.

Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. *Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this Law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life.*

THIS song was composed in order "to be a witness for God against the children of Israel" to the remotest ages[a]. It contains a summary of God's dealings with them, and of the provocations whereby they constrained him at last to visit them with his heavy displeasure. At the same time, it gives an intimation of his mercies, which he has yet in reserve for them, when they and the Gentiles shall be incorporated into one Church, and become one fold under one Shepherd[b]. Having recited this song in the ears of all the Elders of Israel, he entreats them to treasure it up in their hearts, and to impress it on the minds of the rising generation, that so it may answer the end for which it was composed.

From the counsel here given to all Israel, I will take occasion to shew,

I. The regard which we should manifest towards the Gospel of Christ—

The testimony of Moses, though comprised in this song, did, in fact, comprehend "all the words of God's Law." In like manner, that which I have testified amongst you, whilst, in fact, it comprehends

[a] Deut. xxxi. 19. [b] ver. 43.

the entire Gospel, may be comprised in these few words: "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son: he that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life[c]." St. Paul, in still fewer words, sums it up in this significant expression, "Christ crucified[d]."

Now the regard which this demands, is,

1. That you receive it cordially yourselves—

[It is not sufficient that you hear it, or approve of it, or form your sentiments in accordance with it: you must "set your hearts unto it:" you must feel towards it as you would towards a boat that was pressing towards you, whilst clinging to a plank in the midst of the ocean. You may form some conception of the eagerness with which you would welcome its arrival, and embrace the salvation which it offered you: and those very emotions should you realize, when a Saviour is set before you to deliver you from the guilt you have contracted, and the condemnation you have merited at the hands of your offended God — — — In this way must you set your hearts "unto ALL the words" which God has testified by my mouth: you must embrace *the doctrines*, as declaring what you are *to believe;* and with equal avidity are you to lay hold upon *the precepts* which God requires you *to obey*. Neither the one, nor the other, are to be viewed as hard sayings, which you would gladly modify to your own corrupt taste; but both of them are to be viewed as moulds, into which your whole soul is to be poured; so that in every thing you may be conformed to the mind and will of God — — —]

2. That you commend it earnestly to others—

[You are not to be content to go to heaven alone: you must endeavour to draw all you can along with you. Has God imparted to you *knowledge?* you must labour to communicate it. Has he given you *influence?* you must exert it to the utmost of your power. Has he invested you with *authority?* you must employ it for God. Are you as magistrates? you are "not to bear the sword in vain," but to use it for him, whose representatives and vicegerents you are[e]. Are you parents? you must, like Abraham, "command your children, and your household to keep the way of the Lord[f]." Advice is not sufficient. If that prevail, it is well: you have gained your end by gentle means; which should always be

[c] 1 John v. 11, 12. [d] 1 Cor. ii. 2.
[e] Rom. xiii. 1—4. [f] Gen. xviii. 19. with the text.

resorted to in the first instance: but, if advice will not effect your purpose, you must exert authority, yes, even though your children have arrived at man's estate. Eli did reprove his sons, saying, "Nay, my sons, this is no good report that I hear of you; you make the Lord's people to transgress." But when he saw that they persevered in their iniquities, he should have turned them out of their priestly office: and because he neglected thus to exercise his authority, God visited him and his posterity with the heaviest judgments, even to many generations[g]. To every parent, then, I say, The blood of your children will be required at your hands: and, though you cannot impart unto them any saving grace, you must keep a firm hand in restraining them from every thing that will be injurious to their souls; and must labour in every possible way to bring them to Christ, that they may be saved from wrath through him.]

And let me mark,

II. The reasonableness of our duty in relation to this matter—

The service of God altogether is "a reasonable service[h];" and more especially that duty commended to us in our text.

1. The testimony itself is highly worthy of our regard—

[What is it that we testify? It is, that God has redeemed us by the blood of his dear Son, and will cast out none who come to him in his Son's name——— And "is this a vain thing?" is it *doubtful*, so that we may question it? or *unimportant*, that we may trifle with it? Let the Apostle Paul determine this: "This is a *faithful* saying, and *worthy of all acceptation*, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners[i]." Yes, indeed; it is "no cunningly-devised fable," but the very truth of God, to which the whole Scriptures bear witness: and it is "the very wisdom of God, yea, and the power of God[k]," so that, in comparison of it, there is nothing, either in heaven or earth, that gives any just conception of the Deity. In this mystery all the perfections of the Godhead unite, and harmonize, and are glorified.]

2. On our regard to it our eternal happiness depends—

["It is our life, *whether theoretically considered*, or *practically applied*. Our blessed Lord says, "I am the way, the

[g] 1 Sam. ii. 33—36.
[h] Rom. xii. 1.
[i] 1 Tim. i. 15.
[k] 1 Cor. i. 24.

truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me[l]." There is no way of reconciliation with God but through the sacrifice of Christ. No man can make atonement for his own sins: and every soul that would be saved, must "submit to the righteousness of God," even to that mode of justification which God has proposed in his Gospel[m]. It was this that distinguished Abel from Cain: Cain brought an offering of the ground; but Abel, looking forward to the Saviour, brought a living sacrifice from his flock[n]. And this is what we also must do. We must look to Christ, and believe in Christ, and lay our sins on him, as the Jewish offerer did on his sacrifice. If we do this, we shall be saved: for "all who believe in Christ shall be justified from all things[o]:" but, if we do it not, "there remaineth for us no other sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation[p]."]

I will now CONCLUDE, with drawing your attention to,

1. The circumstances under which this counsel was given—

["*On the self-same day*" that his counsel was given, "was Moses to go up to Mount Abarim and die[q]." This, then, was the dying testimony of Moses. And I, if I were now on my dying-bed, would give to you precisely the same counsel, and entreat you all to "set your hearts to what I have this day testified amongst you." "Lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul, my beloved Brethren, and bind them for a sign upon your hand, that they may be as frontlets between your eyes." And to every individual I would say, "Teach them unto your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up: and thou shalt write them upon the door-posts of thine house, and upon thy gates[r]." Use all possible means of bringing these things to your remembrance[s]: but rest not satisfied, till they have wrought a thorough work upon your souls, and you are "cast into them as into a mould" that shall assimilate you altogether unto God's perfect image[t].]

2. The circumstances which must infallibly ere long result from them—

[Of this counsel both you and your adviser must shortly give account at the judgment-seat of Christ. In God's book of remembrance, every word is already recorded, together with the manner in which it has been both delivered and received.

[l] John xiv. 6. [m] Rom. x. 3. [n] Gen. iv. 3—5.
[o] Acts xiii. 39. [p] Heb. x. 26, 27. [q] ver. 40—50.
[r] Deut. xi. 18—20. [s] Heb. ii. 1. [t] Rom. vi. 17. the Greek.

Fain would I, my Brethren, be "free from your blood," in that awful day. I would, too, that "you also might, every one of you, deliver your own souls[u]." But it is indeed most painful to your minister to reflect, that perhaps at this very moment, whilst labouring to save your souls, he is sinking many of them into yet deeper perdition: for we may be sure, that, "if he who despised Moses' Law died without mercy, there is a yet sorer punishment" awaiting those who despise the Gospel[x]. I appeal to yourselves, "How shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation[y]?" Now, then, let me prevail upon you to go unto your God, and to entreat of Him to write these things upon your hearts by his Holy Spirit: for I declare unto you, that "they are your life:" yes, "I call heaven and earth to record against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both ye and your seed may live[z]."]

[u] Ezek. xxxiii. 2—9.
[x] Heb. x. 28, 29.
[y] Heb. ii. 3.
[z] Deut. xxx. 19.

## CCXXXIX.

### THE BLESSING BESTOWED ON THE TRIBE OF LEVI.

Deut. xxxiii. 8, 9. *And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.*

AS the father of his people, Moses desired to bless them before his death; and the pronouncing of this blessing, in which he was endued with a spirit of prophecy, was the last act of his life. The grounds on which the blessing was bestowed on the tribe of Levi, are so peculiar, that they deserve a distinct consideration. There is manifestly a testimony given them of decided approbation: and from this circumstance commentators have been led to regard the whole of what is spoken in the text as of the same import; and to supply from conjecture what is nowhere noticed in the Mosaic history, or rather to contradict altogether what is plainly noticed. The conduct of Levi both at *Massah* (which was also called

Meribah), and, above thirty-eight years afterwards, at another place called *Meribah*, was exceeding sinful[a]. At the latter place in particular, both Moses and Aaron, as well as the people, offended God; and were for that offence doomed to die in the wilderness, and never to enter into the promised land. Hence it might have been supposed that God would punish the tribe of Levi and the house of Aaron by withdrawing from them the peculiar honours he had conferred upon them; but as on one occasion they had signalized themselves by a very exalted act of obedience, he was pleased to record what they had done, and to make it an occasion of continuing in their line the most distinguished testimonies of his regard. This sense accords with the history; to the very terms of which the text seems specifically to refer[b].

In the words before us there are two things particularly to be noticed;

1. The commendation of Levi—

The act for which they were commended was truly laudable—

[When the people throughout the camp of Israel were worshipping the golden calf, Moses, filled with indignation, called the Levites to him, and bade them gird on swords and slay the ringleaders in idolatry throughout the whole camp: and this order they executed immediately, without any respect of persons whatever: they spared not either their nearest relatives or their dearest friends; but slew of the people three thousand men[c].

This would be thought by many to be a savage act, and to deserve censure rather than praise: but it must be remembered, that God was, if I may so speak, their earthly Governor (they lived under a theocracy); and, that they acted in obedience to their supreme Magistrate: nor could cruelty be imputed to them any more than to any person who executes the laws amongst ourselves. They were justified in what they did, precisely as Phinehas was justified in destroying Zimri and Cozbi. The law itself required, that, if their nearest relative only enticed them to idolatry, even where there was no

[a] Compare Exod. xvii. 7. with Numb. xx. 10—13.
[b] Compare the language in Numb. xx. 13. with the text.
[c] Exod. xxxii. 25—29.

overt act committed, they should instantly give information against him, and with their own hands put him to death[d]. But here was the overt act visible to all; and the civil magistrate was present to sanction their conduct: and therefore they were bound to obey the order given them, and to execute the laws with impartial severity. Hence their conduct is marked in our text as an act of obedience to God, and a "vindication of the quarrel of his covenant[e]."]

Nor is it by any means unconnected with *our* duty as Christians—

[Certainly *we* have nothing to do with the judgment of zeal, nor any right to take the execution of the laws into our own hands. But we should be zealous for the honour of God; and we ought, in subserviency to the laws, to exert ourselves for the suppression of open impiety and profaneness. More particularly are we bound to serve God ourselves, and to account all personal sacrifices as unworthy of a thought in comparison of our duty to him. Our Lord tells us, not only that "if we love father or mother more than him, we are not worthy of him;" but that we must "*hate* father and mother, yea, and our own lives also, if we would be his disciples[f]." Of course this must not be understood *positively;* (for the Gospel inspires nothing but *love*, and *that* even to our bitterest enemies:) but it must be taken *comparatively;* and be explained as intimating, that we should be so firm and decided in our obedience to him as to be altogether unmoved by the affection or menaces of our dearest friends, or even by the apprehensions of the most cruel death. Our Lord himself has set us an example in this respect: for, when some persons told him that his "mother and his brethren were standing without, and desirous to speak with him, he replied, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother and sister and mother[g]." Thus must love to the Creator be the predominant affection in *our* hearts; and all inferior considerations must be subordinated to his glory.]

From the commendation given them we proceed to notice,

II. Their reward—

This may be considered as of two kinds;

1. Official honour—

[The Urim and Thummim were in some way united to the

[d] Deut. xiii. 6—10. [e] Lev. xxvi. 25. with the text.
[f] Matt. x. 37. and Luke xiv. 26. [g] Matt. xii. 47—50.

breast-plate of the high-priest; and by means of them he was enabled to discover the mind and will of God when he went in before the Lord to consult him on any particular occasion. What they were, and how they answered the purpose for which they were made, we are not informed: and therefore it is in vain to waste time in conjectures. Suffice it to say, that the high-priest who wore them was authorized to consult God in all public matters, and enabled to discover his mind and will[h]. Now Moses prays, and indeed prophetically declares, that this high honour should descend to the posterity of Aaron; and that the service of the tabernacle should continue to be administered by the tribe of Levi[i]. This was a most exalted privilege; and, above a thousand years afterwards, it was expressly declared to have been given as a reward of the obedience before referred to[k]. What a glorious testimony was this, that God will suffer nothing that we do for him to pass unnoticed even here: much less shall it go unrewarded in a future world. Truly "them that honour God, God will honour;" and every one that will serve him shall receive an abundant "recompence of reward" — — —]

2. Personal benefit—

[The official honour was conferred on the posterity of those whose conduct was approved. But do we suppose that the immediate agents were overlooked, and that no blessing was bestowed on them? We can have no doubt but that they also had a recompence in their own bosoms. The import of the words *Urim* and *Thummim* is, *Illuminations* and *Perfections:* and these are the special benefits which God will confer on all his faithful servants. There is indeed a manifest connexion between the work and the reward. The work in this present instance was a vigorous maintenance of God's honour, with an utter disregard of every consideration in comparison of it: and where that is, there will be a clear insight into the divine will, and a growing conformity to the divine image. Where internal rectitude is wanting, the mind will be obscured, and the feet will stumble: but "where the single eye is, there will the whole body be full of light," and the conversation be regulated agreeably to the commands of God. Light in the mind, and holiness in the life, are mutually influential on each other: each will languish or be advanced, according as the other flourishes or decays: illumination and perfection will be the portion of the decided Christian; but darkness and inconsistency will be the fruit of a temporizing and timid conduct.]

To prevent misapprehension or misconduct, we shall SUBJOIN a word,

[h] Exod. xxviii. 29, 30. [i] Deut. xxxiii. 11, 12. [k] Mal. ii. 5.

1. Of caution—

[Let not any one imagine that religion countenances a fiery zeal on any occasion whatever. The conduct of the Levites has not been proposed for imitation under the gospel dispensation, any further than is necessary for the maintaining of steadfastness in our allegiance to God. We are not to wage war, except against our spiritual enemies: and even then the weapons of our warfare must not be carnal, but spiritual. In all the opposition which it may be necessary to make to our earthly friends or relatives, we must maintain a holy meekness and patience, not attempting to oppose evil by evil, but to "overcome evil with good." The civil magistrate indeed may use the sword, and ought to be "a terror to evil-doers;" and all Christians should be ready to aid him in the suppression of iniquity: but in all private and personal concerns our only armour must be that which God himself has provided for us[l], and we must "overcome our enemies by the blood of the Lamb[m]."]

2. Of direction—

[Let a concern for God's honour and your own spiritual advancement be paramount to all other considerations whatever. You must "not account even life itself dear to you, so that you may but finish your course with joy." It must never be a question with you, whether you will perform any particular duty, however difficult it may be, or whatever self-denial it may require: your mind must be made up to "follow the Lord fully," and to observe the commandments of God "without preferring one before another, and doing nothing by partiality." This is the way to entail the blessing of God upon your souls, and to "grow both in knowledge and in grace." But you must not attempt these things in your own strength: in order that you may be enabled to act thus, you must pray to "the God of peace to sanctify you wholly," and to "make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory for ever and ever: Amen[n]."]

[l] Eph. vi. 11—17. [m] Rev. xii. 11.
[n] 1 Thess. v. 23. Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

## CCXL.

### THE PRIVILEGE OF THOSE WHO LIVE NEAR TO GOD.

Deut. xxxiii. 12. *Of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long.*

AS God was pleased to communicate to some in former ages the knowledge of future events, so he

frequently imparted to them the spirit of prophecy in a more abundant measure, about the time of their death. Thus Isaac and Jacob were peculiarly inspired at that season to foretell the things which should befall their children. Thus Moses also, when about to be gathered to his fathers, was commissioned to declare the states and circumstances of all the different tribes after their entrance into Canaan. Of Benjamin he foretold, that his tribe should be situated close to the place which God had chosen for himself[a]; and that his proximity to the Lord's immediate residence should be to him a source and occasion of the richest benefits.

If it be considered how comprehensive many of the prophecies are, and how the Apostles themselves continually apply them to the general circumstances of the Church of Christ, we shall not be thought to put a force upon the text, while we take occasion from it to set forth,

I. The state of God's people—

The situation of the tribe of Benjamin may serve at least as an emblem to represent the state of "God's beloved." They are "a people *near unto God*[b]," "*dwelling by* him, and *covered by* him, all the day long."

1. They maintain a sense of the divine presence—

[They not only cannot, like the generality, live "without God in the world," or rest, as many professors of religion do, in a round of formal duties; they are sensible that "God searcheth the heart and trieth the reins." They long to have a conviction of this fastened upon their minds, and to see, as it were, on every place this inscription written, "Thou, God, seest me." They do not harbour secret sin because it is invisible to man; but, assured that "the darkness is no darkness

[a] This was remarkably fulfilled: for Mount Zion, whereon the temple was built, belonged to Judah: but the remainder of Jerusalem, and almost the whole of Mount Moriah (of which Mount Zion was a part) belonged to Benjamin: so literally true was it, that God, the head of all the tribes, "dwelt between the shoulders of Benjamin." And this very circumstance occasioned the tribe of Benjamin to adhere to Judah, when the other ten tribes, under Jeroboam, apostatized from the worship of Jehovah. [b] Ps. cxlviii. 14.

with God," and that he beholds the very counsels of the heart, they strive to "set him ever before them;" and to "walk in his fear all the day long."]

2. They walk in dependence on the divine aid—

[They are scarcely more conscious of their own existence, than they are of their utter insufficiency for any thing that is good. They have so often failed through their reliance on their own strength, and they feel such a proneness to every species of iniquity, if left one moment to themselves, that they are compelled to cry to their God for help. And, if they were not sure that "the grace of Christ is sufficient" for all who trust in it, they would utterly despair of holding out unto the end. Hence their continual prayer is, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe:" and God imparts to them his promised assistance[c].]

3. They delight in doing the divine will—

[The "commandments of God are not grievous" to them. Their only grief is, that they do not obey them with greater readiness and joy. Not but that they often find the workings of an evil principle, that would bring them back again into captivity to sin and Satan: but, through the operation of the blessed Spirit, they are enabled to get the victory over their corrupt nature, and both to obey the law outwardly, and to "delight in it after their inward man[d]." They would gladly do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven, without reluctance, without weariness, and without reserve.]

There doubtless is a great difference between the attainments of different saints: yet this is, *on the whole*, the state of all; and that they are blessed in it will appear by considering,

II. The privileges they enjoy by means of it—

While the saints thus live nigh to God, God "keeps them in safety," and covers them,

1. From the curse of the law—

[We might speak of their deliverance even from *temporal* evils: since they have none which are not sanctified to their souls, and made blessings in disguise[e]. But respecting *spiritual* evils we are warranted to speak with the fullest confidence. The saints may, it is true, be left to dread the wrath of God[f]: but it shall never come upon them[g]. While they are

[c] Zech. x. 12. Isai. xxvi. 3.
[d] Rom. vii. 14—25.
[e] Job v. 19—24.
[f] Ps. lxxvii. 7—9.
[g] Rom. viii. 1.

endeavouring to walk in communion with God, in dependence on him, and obedience to him, they have nothing to fear. God has pledged himself, that they shall never perish[h].]

2. From the assaults of Satan—

[Satan will indeed exert all his power to destroy them; but he shall not finally prevail against them. He may "buffet them," and cast "his fiery darts" at them; but he is a vanquished enemy; and shall, ere long, be bruised under the feet of even the weakest saints[i]. Like the kings whom Joshua subdued, all the powers of hell shall one day be brought out of their dungeons, to receive, from the very lips of those whom now they persecute, the sentence they so justly merit[k].]

3. From the power and prevalence of sin—

[Notwithstanding "the law of sin in their members," God's promise to all his people is, that "sin shall not have dominion over them[l]." As by the operation of fire on the hearth we may see what it would effect, if suffered to extend itself over the whole house, so by the working of sin in our hearts we may clearly see, to what a state we should quickly be reduced, if God should suffer it to rage with all its force. But he fulfils his word: and though thousands of times we have been, as it were, on the very brink of falling, God has interposed by his providence or grace to preserve our souls: and we remain to this day living monuments of his almighty power, and unchanging faithfulness.]

EXHORTATION—

1. Let us seek to become "the beloved of the Lord"—

[We account it no small happiness to be beloved of our fellow-creatures; but how much more to be beloved of the Lord! Whose favour is comparable to his? whose so honourable, so permanent, so beneficial[m]? Let us then go to him in the name of Jesus; *for whose sake* we shall be admitted to his favour[n], and be "blessed by him with all spiritual blessings."]

2. Let us endeavour to live more and more near to God—

[It is our privilege to dwell in God, and to have God dwelling in us. We might "walk with God," as Enoch did, and though not visibly, yet really, converse with him as our

[h] Isai. lv. 7. John x. 27, 28.
[i] Ps. xci. 1—3. Jam iv. 7. Rom. xvi. 20.
[k] 1 Cor. vi. 3.
[l] Rom. vi. 14.
[m] Ps. lxiii. 3.
[n] John xiv. 21.

friend[o]. And what greater encouragement can we desire, than that which the text affords? Others may fall; but we shall be "covered, and kept in safety[p]:" others may apostatize to their perdition; but we shall be preserved through faith unto everlasting salvation[q].]

[o] 1 John i. 3. [p] Isai. liv. 17. [q] 1 Pet. i. 5.

## CCXLI.

### STRENGTH ACCORDING TO OUR DAYS.

Deut. xxxiii. 25. *As thy days, so shall thy strength be.*

PREVIOUS to his departure from them, Moses pronounced a blessing on all the tribes of Israel. The blessing to each was appropriate and prophetic. That assigned to Asher was, that his posterity should be numerous and happy; that his provision should be abundant, and his strength, under every emergency, fully adequate to the occasion. It is thought indeed by some, that the promise, "thy shoes shall be iron and brass," referred to mines in that part of Canaan which should be allotted to them: but it appears to me to import rather, that they should be possessed of great power; and to agree exactly with that address of the Prophet Micah to Zion, "Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion! for I will make thine horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass; and thou shalt beat in pieces many people[a]." Then the meaning of our text will be clear; namely, that whatever difficulties they might have to contend with, they should find their strength sufficient for them.

Now, though many parts of the blessings here pronounced were doubtless so peculiar as to have no reference except to the particular tribe to which they were addressed, yet such parts as were of a more general nature may, without impropriety, be more largely applied to the Israel of God in all ages. Such parts will be found in almost all the addresses to the different tribes; and the promise in our text most assuredly admits of such an interpretation. The promise made to Joshua, "I will not fail thee, nor

[a] Mic. iv. 13.

forsake thee," might appear to belong to him only, as the individual to whom it was personally addressed. Yet St. Paul applied it generally to the whole Church of God in all ages; and authorized all saints, in every period of the world, to regard it as spoken equally to themselves, and to expect most assuredly its accomplishment in their own persons: "God hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that *we* may boldly say, The Lord is *my* helper; I will not fear what man shall do unto me[b]." In like manner, we may interpret this blessing, which was primarily addressed to the tribe of Asher, as properly belonging to all the people of God; so far, at least, as they may be in circumstances which call for similar support.

That we may enter the more fully into the meaning of this promise, I will point out distinctly,

I. What it supposes and implies—

It is here evidently supposed that the Lord's people will have seasons of trial, which will call for more than ordinary support.

And such seasons do sooner or later occur to all; seasons,

1. Of temptation—

[Who is there that does not experience more or less the temptations of Satan? He is not an inactive adversary. At no time is he unobservant of our frame, or unprepared to gain an advantage over us: but there are some times which he selects for his attacks, when he promises himself a more easy victory, and when he puts forth all his devices to draw us into sin. His wiles are unsearchable: innumerable also are the modes in which he makes his assaults upon us. Sometimes he assumes the appearance of an angel of light: at other times his own proper character is clearly marked in the blasphemies which he suggests to our minds: and, on all such occasions, if we were not succoured from on high, we should fall before him, as lambs before a devouring lion.

The world, too, presents its temptations on every side: it proposes to us its pleasures, its riches, its honours, as objects that may well stand in competition with Jehovah himself, and rival him in our affections.

[b] Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

And our own corrupt hearts, too, are ready enough to indulge all manner of irregular desires, and to draw us into the commission of actual sin.

What would become of us, if, at such seasons as these, we had none to succour us, no arm but our own to help us?]

2. Of trouble—

[" We are born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward:" it is the inheritance of every child of man. No one is exempt: a king upon his throne is open to its incursions, no less than the meanest of his subjects. In his own person, he is exposed to pains and disorders: in his family, to feuds and bitter bereavements: in his circumstances, to all the varieties of change, embarrassment, and loss. To all of these the saints are exposed, as well as others; whilst they are oppressed with many troubles peculiar to themselves. What they often endure from the workings of corruption, the hidings of God's face, the assaults of Satan, the fear of death and judgment, can little be conceived by those who fear not God. Most generally, too, they are exposed to hatred and persecution for righteousness' sake; and find amongst their "greatest foes the people of their own household." True it is, that we are not in the present day called to "resist unto blood:" but let it not, therefore, be accounted a small matter to be treated with contempt by friends and enemies, and to be reduced to the alternative of sacrificing all that we hold dear in this life, or the hopes and prospects of a better. These are great and heavy trials: and every child of God must expect to be conformed to his Lord and Saviour in the endurance of them.]

3. Of difficulty—

[Truly spiritual obedience is at all times difficult: and how much more so under such circumstances as those in which Daniel and the Hebrew Youths were placed! To resist an ordinance of a powerful monarch, when the whole empire were joining in the observance of it, and when that disobedience was menaced with a fiery furnace; and to maintain steadfastly the public worship of Jehovah, when, by a temporary neglect or concealment of it, an exposure in a den of lions might be avoided—were no easy matters. It surely needed much grace to maintain a good conscience under such circumstances. And there will be, in the experience of every saint, some special occasions where a strict adherence to duty is inconceivably difficult and painful. Such "days" the promise in our text teaches us to expect, and against such days it makes for us a merciful provision.]

But let us distinctly state,

II. What it engages and assures—

Whatever our trials be, strength shall be given us in proportion to them: and our communications from God shall be,

1. Seasonable—in respect of time—

[Often, if succour were delayed, we should fall a prey to our great adversary. But "God's eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in behalf of them that fear him[c]:" and the very instant he sees us ready to sink, he interposes for our help. He has promised that he would do so: "He will judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and that there is none shut up or left[d]." "In the very mount" of difficulty "he will be seen." The Apostle Paul experienced this on a very trying occasion. When summoned before that bloody tyrant, Nero, "all his friends forsook him; but the Lord stood by him, and strengthened him, that through him the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear[e]." Had he not been thus strengthened in the very hour of need, his courage might have failed: but by this seasonable interposition of the Deity, he was enabled to maintain his ground, and execute the trust committed to him. And David also attests that this was his frequent experience: "In the day when I cried, thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul[f]."]

2. Suitable—to the particular occasion—

[Different are the communications that are wanted under different circumstances. Sometimes wisdom is necessary: and that shall be imparted as our necessities may require. This was promised, in a more especial manner, by our Lord to his disciples: "When they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say; for the Holy Ghost shall teach you *in that same hour* what ye ought to say[g]." If patience be wanted, that in like manner shall be supplied: for "he will strengthen us with all might by his Spirit in the inner man, unto all patience, and long-suffering with joyfulness[h]." If faith be that which is more especially necessary for the soul, he will impart that in richer abundance. We have a very striking instance of this in Peter. Our Lord had forewarned him that he would deny his Master: and if Peter, after the perpetration of this evil, had given way to despondency, he would have perished in his iniquity, just as Judas did. But

[c] 2 Chron. xvi. 9. [d] Deut. xxxii. 36. [e] 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.
[f] Ps. cxxxviii. 3. [g] Luke xii. 11, 12. [h] Col. i. 11.

our Lord "prayed for him, that his faith might not fail:" and through the operation of this grace upon his soul, he was kept from destruction, and restored to the favour of his God. In a word, the grace which he will bestow in the time of need shall be a tree of life in the soul, "bringing forth its fruit in its season[i]," yea, "twelve manner of fruits[k]," according to the occasion that may call for them, and the season to which they may be suited.]

3. Sufficient for our utmost necessities—

["Our strength shall be fully equal to our day." Let our weakness be ever so great, or our trial ever so heavy, our Lord "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will, with the temptation, make for us a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it[l]." Certainly, the trials of St. Paul were as numerous and heavy as ever were sustained by mortal man: and under them, especially under that which he calls a thorn in his flesh, and the buffetings of Satan, he cried mightily to the Lord for deliverance. The answer given to him by our Lord was, "My grace is sufficient for thee; and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness." Now, behold, how all his troubles were in an instant turned into occasions of joy! "Most gladly, therefore," says he, "will I rather *glory in* my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I *take pleasure* in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong[m]." And from that time we find him hurling defiance at all his enemies, how numerous and powerful soever they might be: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation? or distress? or persecution? or famine? or nakedness? or peril? or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. And I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord[n]."]

As the promise made to the tribe of Asher may fitly be applied to believers generally, let us consider,

III. What it speaks more especially to God's peculiar people—

Truly, it is a most instructive passage of Holy Writ: for it shews, to all God's believing people,

[i] Ps. i. 3. [k] Rev. xxii. 2. [l] 1 Cor. x. 13.
[m] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. [n] Rom. viii. 35—39.

1. The grounds of their security—

[Believers, or unbelievers, we have no strength in ourselves: our strength is in God alone: and, if ever we be strong at all, it must "be in the Lord, and in the power of his might[o]." His power, as engaged for us, and his fidelity, as pledged to us, are the true, and proper, and only grounds of a sinner's hope. Let the promise which we are now considering be apprehended, and relied upon, and pleaded in faith and prayer, and we can have nothing to fear. "A very worm," so supported, shall "thresh the mountains[p]." "If God be for us, none can be against us[q]" — — —]

2. The reason of their falls—

[Notwithstanding what is spoken in the text, it is certain that many saints do fall, and *that* most grievously. But whence is this? Is not God "able to make them stand[r]?" or is He not "faithful who hath promised[s]?" Know ye, Brethren, that the fault is not in God; but in his people themselves, who either become unwatchful, and are therefore left to reap the fruits of their heedlessness; or indulge self-confidence, and are therefore given up for a season to betray their weakness and folly. To these causes must be traced the falls of David and of Peter. If God have engaged to "keep the feet of his saints[t]," he has not given them therefore a licence to rush into temptation, or to relax their vigilance, or to confide in themselves. His word is true: and he will fulfil it to all who plead it with him. But if we grow remiss and careless, he will leave us to "eat the fruit of our own ways, and to be filled with our own devices[u]." I will ask of any one that has been left to dishonour God, and to wound his own soul; "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the Lord, when he led thee by the way[x]?" He has warned thee that it should be thus: "The Lord is with you, while ye be with him: if ye seek him, he will be found of you: but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you[y]."]

3. The extent of their privileges—

[Weak as we are, and in the midst of enemies, still he would have us "without carefulness." He has bidden us to "cast all our care on Him who careth for us[z]." He considers himself as dishonoured when we indulge any doubts or fears: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith[a]?" "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from

[o] Eph. vi. 10. [p] Isai. xli. 14, 15. [q] Rom. viii. 31.
[r] Rom. xiv. 4. [s] Heb. x. 23. [t] 1 Sam. ii. 9.
[u] Prov. i. 31. [x] Jer. ii. 17. [y] 2 Chron. xv. 2.
[z] 1 Pet. v. 7. [a] Matt. viii. 26.

the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary: there is no searching of his understanding? *He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might, he increaseth strength.* Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but *they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;* they shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall "run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint[b]." "Know, then, in whom you have believed; that He is both able and willing to keep that which you have committed to him[c]." And let not any dangers, however imminent, appal you. "Say not ye, A confederacy, to all them to whom others shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid: but sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself: and let *him* be your fear, and let *him* be your dread: and he will be to you for a sanctuary[d]." O blessed tidings! Rejoice in them, Beloved, and realize them in your souls. Then shall you enjoy both stability and peace: for "God will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on him. Trust ye, therefore, in the Lord for ever: for with the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength[e]."]

[b] Isai. xl. 28—31. [c] 2 Tim. i. 12. [d] Isai. viii. 12—14. [e] Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.

## CCXLII.

### THE HAPPINESS OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

Deut. xxxiii. 29. *Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency!*

THE God of Israel is infinitely exalted above all the gods of the heathen: and though there cannot be any such disparity between one creature and another, as between the Creator and the creature, yet is there a wonderful difference between the people of God and all other people upon the face of the whole earth. This indeed is a necessary consequence of the former: for, if there be no god like the God of Israel, there can be no people like the Israel of God, since they, and they only, have Jehovah for their God. These truths are united in the passage before us: the former had been mentioned in a

preceding verse[a]; and, in the text, the latter is declared, together with its dependence on the former.

From these words we shall consider,

I. The happiness of God's people—

The manner in which Moses speaks on this subject is worthy of notice: we may observe in his address to Israel a strong persuasion of the truth he was uttering, an unfeigned delight in declaring it, and an affectionate solicitude, that they might both be persuaded of it themselves, and live in the comfortable enjoyment of it. He affirms that they were,

1. Truly happy—

[It is God's own declaration, "Happy art thou, O Israel!" and, if appearances were ever so unfavourable, we might be sure that his judgment was according to truth. But this testimony agrees with the experience of God's people in every age. They are represented as possessing a "peace that passeth understanding," and a "joy that is unspeakable and glorified." Is it objected that they are also represented as mourning[b], as tempted[c], as persecuted[d]? True; yet none of these things interfere with their real happiness; yea, instead of destroying, they advance it[e]. If then they can be happy in such situations as these[f], and even derive happiness from these situations[g], they must be truly happy.]

2. Incomparably happy—

[It is God himself who challenges all mankind to vie with his people; and this too, not in respect of privileges merely, or of prospects, but in respect of present enjoyments. Who are they that will presume to rival the Lord's people? Ye great, ye rich, ye gay, what is your happiness, when compared with that which God's Israel possess? Is not all your happiness *mixed* with gall? Is it not altogether *dependent* on the creature? Is it not *cloying*, even in the very possession? Do you not find it *transient*, and, on the whole, *delusive*, promising far more in the anticipation than it ever affords in the enjoyment? In all these things it is the very reverse of the Christian's happiness. His, as far as it is derived from spiritual things, is unmixed: none can rob him of it, because none can intercept the visits of his God: no man was ever surfeited with spiritual delights: if we lived to the age of Methuselah, we might, by a retrospect, revive a sense of them in our souls: and, if our

[a] ver. 26. [b] Matt. v. 3, 4.
[c] Jam. i. 2, 12. [d] Luke vi. 22, 23. 1 Pet. iv. 14.
[e] See the passages just referred to.
[f] Acts xvi. 23—25. [g] Acts v. 41. 2 Cor. xii. 10.

expectations be raised to ever so high a pitch, the reality will far exceed them. We will therefore confidently repeat the challenge, and say, as in the text, "Who is like unto thee, O people, saved by the Lord?"]

To shew that this is no enthusiastic conceit, we proceed to notice,

II. The grounds of their happiness—

It will soon appear that their blessedness is not a baseless fabric, if we consider,

1. What God has done for them—

[They are "a people saved by the Lord." Salvation is not a blessing which they merely hope for, but which they already possess. They are saved *from the guilt and punishment of sin:* all "their iniquities are blotted out;" and there remains "no condemnation to them:" they are "complete in Christ;" they stand "before God without spot or blemish." But great as this mercy is, they would not be truly happy, if they were not also saved *from the power and dominion of sin.* It is true, they yet carry about with them a "body of sin and death;" but they never commit iniquity as they were wont to do in their unregenerate state: they "cannot sin *thus*, because they are born of God, and his seed remaineth in them." God has promised that "sin shall not have dominion over them;" and they experience the accomplishment of this promise to their souls, being "redeemed from all iniquity, and purified unto God a peculiar people zealous of good works[h]."

And is not this salvation a ground of happiness, more especially if we consider by whom it was procured, and by whom conferred? It was "the Lord," even Jesus, who purchased our freedom from guilt; and it is "the Lord," even the Holy Ghost, who vouchsafes us a deliverance from sin. Surely such a salvation, bought at such a price, and imparted by such an agent, cannot but be a source of unspeakable felicity to the soul.]

2. What God will be unto them—

[In vain would all past mercies be, if they were not secured to them by the continued agency of Jehovah. A vessel fitted out and freighted, would not more certainly be overwhelmed by storms, if destitute of a pilot, than man, however gifted, would become a prey to Satan, if he were not constantly aided and protected by his God. But Israel is happy in this respect also, since, notwithstanding he is yet upon the field of battle, he is placed, if we may so speak, beyond the reach of harm. He is not only furnished with defensive and offensive armour,

[h] Tit. ii. 14.

but has God himself for his "shield," and God himself for his "sword;" so that his enemies must elude Omniscience, before they can destroy him; and must withstand Omnipotence if they do not fall before him. Hence it is that he attains such "excellency," and proves victorious in all his conflicts.

View the believer thus environed, and thus armed, and you may well say to him, "Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee?" for the salvation he already possesses, is a pledge and earnest of his everlasting triumphs.]

APPLICATION—

[To whom, besides the true Israel, can we venture to say, "Happy art thou?" Art thou happy, who, instead of having experienced salvation, art yet under the guilt and power of all thy sins; and, instead of having Jehovah for thy shield and thy sword, hast the almighty God for thine enemy? Deceive not thyself: thou mayest dream of happiness; but thou art in a pitiable condition. So far art thou from rivalling the happiness of Israel, thou art even inferior to the beasts that perish; and, if thou wert sensible of thy state, thou wouldest envy them their prospect of annihilation. Oh, if ever thou wouldest be happy, seek to be "saved by the Lord," even by the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus, and by the sanctifying influences of his Spirit. What Moses said to his father-in-law, that would God's people say to thee, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for God has spoken good concerning Israel[1]."

As for you who are of the true Israel, seek to be as distinguished for your holiness, as you are for your happiness. When we speak of your felicity, the world cannot understand us, because they are strangers to your feelings. But they can judge of holiness with some considerable degree of accuracy; and your superiority in this respect will be more effectual for their conviction, than all that can be said respecting the happiness of your state. Endeavour then so to live, that we may challenge the world to produce any persons comparable to you in holiness. Enable us to say with confidence, Who is like unto thee, O Israel? Who is dead to the world, as thou art? Who abounds in all holy duties, in all devout affections, in all amiable dispositions, like thee? This will silence those who call your happiness enthusiasm, and will convince them, that you are superior to others, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth."]

[1] Numb. x. 29.

# JOSHUA.

## CCXLIII.

### CHRISTIAN FORTITUDE.

Josh. i. 7—9. *Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the Law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*

IN an address to Joshua, when about to invade a country "wherein were seven nations greater and mightier than he," we might well expect a charge to him to "be strong and very courageous:" but we should naturally suppose, that the exhortation to fortitude would have respect chiefly, if not exclusively, to the enemies whom he was about to encounter: whereas his enemies are left, as it were, altogether out of sight; and no notice is taken but of the Law of God, as that towards which his courage should be exercised. But, as all his success depended entirely upon God, it was indispensably necessary that he should secure the divine favour; which could not be done but by an obedience to God's commands: and an unreserved obedience to them would, in fact, require in him a stronger principle of courage, than the most formidable enemies would give occasion for. In confirmation of this, I will shew,

I. Wherein the fortitude of a Christian soldier should chiefly display itself—

He is to contend with all the enemies of his salvation, in obedience to the laws of God—

[The world, the flesh, and the devil, are the enemies with whom he is to fight — — — Now, a soldier in the army of an earthly prince is to act in all things according to certain rules, which are laid down for him in a code of laws drawn up for that specific purpose: these are called the Articles of War; and with them he is to be conversant, in order that he may conform himself to them in all things. The Christian soldier, also, has his code drawn up for him by God himself, and revealed to him in the Oracles of Truth. This code he is to study with all diligence, and "to meditate on it day and night," that there may be in him an accordance with it in every particular. "Never is he to turn aside from it, to the right hand or to the left." However difficult or self-denying its injunctions, he must obey it: and by it, as a test, must he try all the instruction or advice given to him in relation to his conduct. It must be so sacred in his eyes, that he will die rather than depart from it in any thing. If blamed in any thing, as too scrupulous and too strict, he must refer to that as his standard: "it must be ever in his mouth," as well as in his heart; and he must inculcate on others the same observance as he pays to it himself.]

And this will require all the courage that any man can possess—

[It will require no little courage so to subdue and mortify all his corrupt inclinations, as to have them brought into subjection to the laws of God. And to maintain such an habit in the midst of an ungodly world, will expose him to the heaviest trials. A man who enlists in an army has but to contend with enemies: but the Christian soldier will have to maintain sore conflicts even with his friends: yea, "his greatest foes will be those of his own household." Nor is it only for a season, during a few campaigns, that he must fight; but every day, every hour, throughout his whole life. He is never off the field of battle: he is never at liberty to relax his vigilance for a single hour. His armour must be girt upon him day and night. The weapons, too, with which he is assaulted, are formidable in the extreme. Shall it be thought that death alone has its terrors? I scruple not to say, that there are thousands who would find it easier to face a battery of cannon, than to withstand the sneers, and pity, and contempt, and ridicule, of their nearest and dearest friends. Not but that the Christian soldier must be prepared to "resist even unto blood." If he will not lay down his life for Christ, he cannot be his disciple. And does not this require courage? Worldly

soldiers have many things to animate and imbolden them, which the Christian soldier wants. They are surrounded by multitudes, who are engaged in the same contest, and who invigorate one another by their voices and example; but he engages alone, or nearly so, at the point of attack, and at the time that he is most pressed. They are applauded in proportion to their exertions, and commend themselves to the esteem of all who behold them: but the more strenuously the Christian soldier exerts himself, the more is he hated and despised by all who ought to encourage and commend him: and, instead of looking for any reward in this life, he knows that to his dying hour he has no other treatment to expect. Verily, it is not for nought that the Christian soldier is bidden to be strong and very courageous: for there is more need of a principle of fortitude in him, than in any other person under heaven.]

Let us however notice, on the other hand,

II. The encouragement which God himself affords to all who desire to serve him in truth—

As he reminded Joshua of the grounds he had for encouragement, so he would have us to consider,

1. In whose service we are engaged—

[" Have not I commanded thee?" Yes, it is the God of heaven whose battles we fight, and in whose service we are engaged. Were it only an earthly monarch to whom we had devoted ourselves, we ought to serve him with all fidelity: what, then, should we not do for the King of kings, who has not only chosen us to be his soldiers, but has himself taken the field for *our sakes*, to subdue *our* enemies, and to deliver *us* from their assaults? Contemplate Jehovah as our Covenant-God—contemplate him as assuming our very nature on purpose to fight our battles—consider him as submitting to death itself, that on the very cross he might "spoil the principalities and powers of hell," and "lead captivity itself captive."—This is "the Captain of our salvation" under whom we fight; and shall not that encourage us? Suppose the whole universe combined against us, and issuing their orders that we shall not obey so strictly the laws of God; what reply should we make, but that of the Apostles, "Whether it be right to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; for we cannot but fulfil his will and execute His commands."]

2. The pledge he gives us of his presence and support—

["Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest," said

the Lord to Joshua: and says he not the same to us, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world[a]?" Now, imagine a soldier with his commander and his prince always at his side: would he not be stirred up by that to acts of valour, which, in the absence of such a stimulus, he would be unable to put forth? Know, then, that your God is ever with you; and with you, not only *as a Witness* of your actions, but *as a Helper*, to strengthen you, to uphold you, to combat with you. What encouragement can you desire beyond this? Hear his own words, addressed to every soldier in his army: "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness[b]." What matters it, then, how many there may be against you? If they were as numerous as the sands upon the sea-shore, you may boldly say, "There are more with you than with them." In fact, "If God be for you, who can be against you?" They may assault you, and boast of their triumphs; but they can do nothing, but in accordance with his will, and in subserviency to his designs.]

3. The assurance he gives us of ultimate success—

["Then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and thou shalt have good success." You are persecuted; you are imprisoned; you are put to death: but are you vanquished? Was the Saviour overcome when he was put to death? Did he not "by death overcome him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage?" "He was the stone which the builders rejected: but, is he not the Head-stone in the corner?" Know, then, that you are not to estimate victory by the present and temporary effects, but by the ultimate and everlasting results. Be it so; you are sorely oppressed, and your enemies are exulting over you: but God's word is not broken: for tribulation is the way to glory; and the cross precedes the crown. Only be content to suffer with Christ; and be assured you shall speedily be "glorified together[c]."]

ADDRESS—

1. Let none expect victory without conflicts—

[What shall we say of the religion of your enemies? Has it any resemblance to the religion of the Bible? Are they hated for righteousness' sake? No: the world cannot hate them, because they are of the world. You, on the contrary, are hated purely because you will conform yourselves to the

[a] Matt. xxviii. 20. [b] Isai. xli. 10. [c] Rom. viii. 17.

laws of God. Be thankful, then, that ye have this evidence that ye are the Lord's.]

2. Let none doubt of victory, who fight in dependence on the Lord's strength, and in conformity to his commands—

[Be strong, and very courageous to do his will — — — But *take special care what kind of fortitude it is that you maintain.* There is an unhallowed boldness, which savours of pride and vain-glory. You cannot be too much on your guard against this. Yours must be *a passive fortitude*, such as Christ manifested when "he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and opened not his mouth." You are to "love your enemies, to bless them that curse you, and to pray for them that despitefully use you." "You are not to be overcome of evil, but to overcome evil with good." In you are to be seen "the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Only fight with these weapons, and, "even though ye be slain like sheep, ye shall be more than conquerors[d]."]

[d] Rom. viii. 36, 37.

## CCXLIV.

### RAHAB PROTECTS THE SPIES.

Josh. ii. 8—14. *And before they were laid down, she came up unto them upon the roof: and she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the Lord, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: and that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the Lord hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee.*

GOD is pleased to accomplish his promises by the use of means: to neglect the means therefore is to tempt him, rather than to trust in him; and to expect

the end without using the means is not faith, but presumption. Hence the strongest believers have always accounted it their duty to exert themselves as much as if success depended solely on their exertions; whilst, on the other hand, they placed their hopes in God, as much as if no effort whatever were used by themselves. Joshua had no doubt respecting his ultimate success in conquering and possessing the land of Canaan: yet, as every prudent General endeavours to obtain information respecting the state of any fortified city which he is about to besiege, before he proceeds actually to invest it, so Joshua felt it his duty to send spies to ascertain the state of Jericho, before he passed over Jordan to attack it. To the spies themselves the undertaking was perilous in the extreme: yet they went forth in humble reliance on their God, and were almost miraculously preserved from falling into the hands of their enemies. The manner of their preservation is here circumstantially related: it was effected solely by the good offices of a woman who lived in the city, and to whom they were providentially directed. Her name was Rahab; and she is constantly in the Scriptures called an harlot; but whether she was at that time an harlot, or was a reformed character, we know not: but this is plain, that her mind was wonderfully overruled by God to screen and protect them. The interposition of God in this matter seems to have been not unlike to that which fifteen hundred years afterwards led to the conversion of Cornelius. Cornelius was instructed in a vision to send for Peter, and was directed where to find him: and at the same time Peter was instructed in a vision to go to him, notwithstanding he was a Gentile. Thus the minds of the spies were directed to the only person in the city that would have afforded them an asylum; and her mind was directed to prefer their safety before every other consideration whatever. The conduct of Rahab on this occasion is repeatedly mentioned in the New Testament, and *that* too in terms peculiarly honourable to her. We shall find it therefore not unprofitable to consider,

I. The service she rendered—

In speaking upon this part of our subject, we shall notice separately,

1. What she did—

[From the first interview which she had with the spies, she knew the true object of their mission; and determined to advance it to the utmost of her power. Her first object therefore was to prevent any discovery: and for this purpose she conducted them to the roof of her house, and there covered them with stalks of flax. As she had foreseen, they were traced to her house, and messengers from the king were sent to apprehend them. She acknowledged that they had been there, but said that they were gone away but a little before, and, if pursued immediately, would certainly be taken. Thus she avoided all suspicion of favouring them, and prevented all further inquiries about them at her house. Having succeeded thus far, she went up to them, and asked of them an assurance, that they, in return for this kindness, would spare her and all her family, when they should take the city. To this they bound themselves and all Israel by a solemn oath; stipulating, however, that the matter should be kept a profound secret; that her family should all be collected under her roof; and that a scarlet line, by which she let them down from her window, should be bound in the window, to prevent any mistake. The instructions which she gave them for the avoiding of their pursuers, were such as prudence directed: these they followed implicitly; and after hiding themselves three days in a neighbouring mountain, they returned across the fords to their own camp in safety. Thus did she effectually preserve the spies that Joshua had sent.]

2. From what principle she acted—

[It certainly appears strange, that she should so betray her king and country; and stranger still, that she should be commended by God himself for this conduct; more especially when we find, that she uttered various falsehoods for the attainment of her end. Let us then investigate this point.

The principle from which she acted, was faith. Of this we are assured on the authority of an inspired Apostle; "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace[a]." The same is manifest in the account before us. She believed that the God of Israel was the only true God. She believed that God was the great Disposer of all events: that he had given the land of Canaan to his people Israel: that he had miraculously opened a way for them through the Red Sea, at their first coming out

[a] Heb. xi. 31.

of Egypt: that he had enabled them to destroy Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites, and to take possession of their land: and that he would infallibly accomplish his promises to them, in the total subjugation of the Canaanites. All this is evident from the very words of our text. Now, if we consider how contracted were the views even of the pious Israelites at that time, this faith, strong and assured as it was, was truly wonderful: it might justly be said of her, as of another Canaanitish woman, "O woman, great is thy faith! I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

But here arises a question of considerable difficulty: How can we reconcile the falsehoods which she uttered with the professions which she made, and with the commendations given her in the Scriptures? To solve this difficulty, commentators have had recourse to various expedients; some extenuating, some justifying, and some altogether condemning her conduct. But we apprehend that the true solution must be found in the strength and assurance of her faith: she herself said, not, "*I fear*," or, "*I believe*," but, "*I know* that the Lord hath given you the land." She was fully assured that it was in vain to fight against God: that, if these two spies were put to death, it would make no difference whatever as to the issue of the contest: that the whole city and all its inhabitants would infallibly be destroyed: and that the only possible way of securing herself and family would be to submit to the God of Israel, and to unite themselves to his people. To what purpose then would it be to deliver up the spies? it would not save one single life: it would only be to continue fighting against God, and to bring on herself and all her family that destruction which it was now in her power to avert. By concealing the spies she, in fact, could injure nobody; but by giving them up, she would sacrifice, both for herself and family, all hopes of life either in this world or the world to come. At the same time that this view of the matter gives the easiest solution to the difficulty, it serves to explain the commendation given to her by the Apostle James: "Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way[b]?" Yes; she did by this act evince the reality and strength of her faith, and prove, that she had determined to cast herself entirely, both for time and for eternity, upon the mercy of the God of Israel.

If it is asked, whether faith in God will produce, or even countenance, falsehood; we answer, No: but that question does not fairly belong to the subject: let it be asked, whether Elisha was justified in deceiving the Syrian army, and leading them from Dothan, whither they had come to destroy him, to

[b] Jam. ii. 25.

Samaria, where they were brought into the power of the king of Israel[c]? Or, if the cases be thought not sufficiently parallel, let any one ask, whether, if a maniac were coming to destroy his whole family, he should not think himself justified in denying them to him, when no evil could accrue to the maniac himself by means of it, and the preservation of so many lives depended on it? Yet even this case, strong as it would be, would fall very far short of Rahab's, whose eternal, no less than temporal, interests depended on her forwarding the purposes of Heaven. But, whether we justify or condemn her conduct, it can afford no precedent to us: for, before we can plead her example in justification of treachery or falsehood, we must be circumstanced like her, which it is nearly impossible we should ever be.]

Such was the service which she rendered to the Lord. Let us now consider,

II. The reward she obtained—

This was greater far than ever she herself could have conceived—

1. She and all her family were preserved—

[In a few days, Joshua and all his army appeared before the city; and, by God's special interposition, took it. The sign before agreed upon had been attended to by Rahab, and the two very persons with whom the agreement had been made were sent to secure the execution of it. They went to the house, brought out Rahab and all her family, and placed them in safety near the camp of Israel: then the order was given to burn the whole city, and to destroy every one of its inhabitants without exception. The fulfilment of the covenant which the spies had entered into is particularly noticed at the taking of Jericho; and Rahab herself long continued in Israel a monument of the mercy of God and of the fidelity of his people[d].

This alone was an exceeding great reward: to be so distinguished *herself;* and, after all the distress which her former wickedness had occasioned to her family, to be made an instrument of saving all *their* lives, surely this was an inestimable benefit, and assimilated her to the angels which rescued Lot and his family from the flames of Sodom.]

2. She is enrolled amongst the number of God's most eminent saints—

[We have already had occasion to refer to the testimony of two Apostles in her behalf. The very scope of one was to illustrate the transcendent excellence of faith, and of the other

[c] 2 Kings vi. 13—19. [d] Josh. vi. 22—25.

to shew its operative and transforming power: by both of them is she united with the patriarch Abraham himself: and by one she is said to be justified by this work of hers, as Abraham was justified by offering up his son Isaac on the altar. The boon she desired was, temporal life; and behold, here was given to her spiritual and eternal life. How loudly did this proclaim to Israel the determination of God to incorporate with them in due time the Gentile world! And how strongly does it declare to us, that "where sin has abounded, grace shall much more abound!" Methinks, as Paul says of himself, that "for this cause he obtained mercy, that in him the chief of sinners God might shew forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them that shall hereafter believe on him to life everlasting," so we may say of this woman. O that all the harlots in the world could hear of the mercy shewed to this notorious prostitute! Despised as they are and abandoned by their fellow-creatures, O that they knew what compassion for them exists in the bosom of their God! They usually persist in their wickedness, through an utter despair of obtaining the mercy and grace which they stand in need of: but here they might see, that the vilest of sinners may become the most eminent of saints. Our Lord indeed tells us, that publicans and harlots are often more willing to seek for mercy than proud self-complacent moralists[e]: O that the instance before us might lead many to repentance, and that, like another of whom we read, "having had much forgiven, they may love much!"]

3. She was made an ancestor of the Messiah himself—

[Mysterious truth! A Gentile, belonging to an accursed nation, and to a place peculiarly obnoxious to the wrath of God; and she too, an harlot of peculiar notoriety; to be chosen of God, not only to become an eminent saint, but an instrument of continuing the line of his elect, and ultimately of bringing into the world his only-begotten Son[f]! What shall we say to this? The truth of it cannot be doubted; for she is expressly mentioned in the genealogy of Christ[g]. How infinitely did *this* honour surpass all that she could ever have imagined! What a reward was here for protecting the spies! But verily we never can entertain too exalted thoughts of God's love and mercy: the riches of his grace are altogether unsearchable, and the extent of his love, incomprehensible.

[e] Matt. xxi. 31. [f] Matt. i. 5.

[g] If *Salmon*, who married her, was, as is by no means improbable, one of the two spies, what beautiful considerations would arise out of that circumstance! But, where there is so much known, it is not desirable, unnecessarily, to introduce conjecture.

This however we may learn from it, that God will abundantly recompense whatever we do for him — — — "Even a cup of cold water given for his sake, shall in no wise lose its reward." Let us then enlarge our expectations from him, and open our mouths wide, that he may fill them. Let us not be afraid to incur risks for him; but let us serve him at all events, accounting nothing of any value in comparison of his favour, nothing desirable but an inheritance with his people — — —[h]]

[h] The brief practical hints contained under these three subdivisions, might be omitted, and added separately as three inferences from the subject. Thus — INFER, 1. There is no person so vile, but he may become an eminent saint—2. Faith, if true, will uniformly produce good works—3. Whatever we do for God shall most assuredly be richly rewarded. This plan would contract the second head; but it would admit of these important thoughts being more expanded and enforced.

## CCXLV.

### THE PASSAGE OF JORDAN COMMEMORATED.

Josh. iv. 20—24. *Those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.*

TO remember God's mercies to us, and to transmit the remembrance of them to future generations, is a solemn duty imposed upon us, especially where the mercies are of such a nature as to involve the welfare of our posterity as well as our own[a]. On different occasions God appointed memorials for that express purpose; and ordered, that the children in all succeeding generations should make inquiries respecting them, and receive an answer from one duly qualified to give the desired instruction. This was the case with respect to the passover, which was

[a] Ps. lxxviii. 4—8.

instituted in order to perpetuate the remembrance of the deliverance of Israel from the sword of the destroying angel, when all the first-born of Egypt were slain[b]. The passage of the Israelites through Jordan was also to be borne in everlasting remembrance. For this end twelve stones were erected in Gilgal; and an order was given, that when children, even to the remotest ages, should inquire what event these stones referred to, they should be informed of all the circumstances which took place when their forefathers first entered into the promised land. We propose to notice two things;

I. The mercy commemorated—

[Here we shall content ourselves with briefly relating the circumstances which preceded and accompanied the passage of the Israelites over the river Jordan. That they are deserving of our attention is evident from the injunction given by the prophet many hundred years afterwards; "O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted, and what Balaam son of Beor answered him *from Shittim unto Gilgal*, that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." *Shittim* was the place from whence they last proceeded (perhaps about seven miles) to the banks of Jordan[c]. There all the people were ordered to sanctify themselves, in order that on the morrow they might be in a fit state to behold the wonders which the Lord was about to do for them[d].

The time being arrived, the ark, which was wont to be carried in the midst of them, was borne before them, and they were to follow it at a respectful distance (about three quarters of a mile), that they might all be able to behold it, and that they might see, that, instead of their protecting it, they owed all their protection to it. And the respectful distance which they were to keep, gives us a most important hint in reference to the mode in which we should on all occasions follow divine providence: precipitancy must be avoided, as well as delay.

As soon as the priests who carried the ark touched the brim of the waters with their feet, (for at that season, the snows of Lebanon having begun to melt, the river, as was usual, had overflowed its banks,) the waters were arrested in their course, and formed a wall on their right hand; whilst those which had

[b] Exod. xii. 24—27. So the unleavened bread, xiii. 7, 8.

[c] Josh. iii. 1.

[d] Josh. iii. 5. A similar order was issued previous to the giving of the law, Exod. xix. 10, 11, 13, 14.

passed them ran down towards the Dead Sea, and left the channel dry for the space of several miles[e]. The priests then proceeded with the ark into the midst of the channel, and abode there whilst the whole nation of Israel, with their cattle and baggage, passed over: nor did they leave their position, till they were expressly ordered to do so by God himself: and then, as soon as ever their feet touched the opposite bank, the waters resumed their course, and flowed in their accustomed channel. What a proof was here, that the passage was opened not by any natural means, but by the immediate agency of God himself! The people "hasted over," for, where so much was to be done in one day, there was no time to be lost; but we do not apprehend that their haste proceeded from any unbelieving fear of the impending flood; it rather indicated a fearless confidence in the divine protection, and an assurance that the enemies whom they were invading should not be permitted to prevail against them.]

Such was the mercy vouchsafed unto them. Let us now proceed more particularly to notice,

II. The means used to perpetuate the remembrance of it—

For this end two monuments were erected; one, of twelve stones, in Jordan, on the very spot where the priests who bore the ark had stood, which was probably visible at low water; and the other in *Gilgal*, where they immediately afterwards encamped.

In our text two reasons are assigned for the erection of them; they were to serve, both to Israel and to the world at large,

1. As evidences of God's power—

[What could not God effect, who by a simple act of volition wrought such a miracle as this? The miracle could not be denied, because the stones which commemorated it were taken out of the midst of the river by persons selected for the purpose out of all the tribes. Who then, we may ask,

*Who can ever oppose him with success?*

It should seem that the Canaanites, if they had acted according to the rules of war, should have opposed the Israelites in their passage: but the destruction of Pharaoh at the Red Sea had spread such a panic through the land, that they did not dare to avail themselves of any supposed advantage, lest they

[e] From the city Adam to the part opposite Jericho was eighteen or twenty miles, Josh. iii. 16.

should perish after his example. The event indeed shews how vain any attempt on their part would have been. And does not this convince us, that, when the measure of any person's iniquities is full, he shall in no wise escape the vengeance of his God? Whatever obstacles may appear to lie in the way, and whatever barrier an ungodly world may have, or think they have, for their defence, God will surely make a way for his indignation: opposing myriads shall be only as the stubble before the consuming fire: "though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Let any one, dreaming of security, go and behold the stones in Gilgal: let him ask of Jordan, "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? and thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" and then let him add with the Psalmist, "Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob[f]." We may further ask,

*Who can ever fail, that trusteth in him?*

There might have been some hope of crossing the ford, as the spies had done, if the river had not overflowed its banks: but now it seemed to present an insurmountable obstacle to their passage, especially considering that their cattle and baggage were to be taken over with them. But this generation were not like those who had perished in the wilderness; they had learned to confide in God: and God interposed for them in a way which they do not appear to have at all expected. It had been promised indeed that they should pass over Jordan, and that no opposition should be made to them in their passage; for that their enemies, "through fear and dread, should be still as a stone" till all the people should have completely passed[g]: but they do not seem to have had any precise idea of the way in which the promises should be accomplished: nor, on the other hand, do they appear to have entertained any doubts but that they should be brought over in safety. Their confidence was well rewarded; and the very impediments which obstructed their progress served only to display and magnify the power of God.

Thus, whatever difficulties his people may have to surmount, they may at all times adopt the triumphant language of the prophet, "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain:" and they may assuredly expect, that He who has "laid the foundation, will finish it, and will bring forth the head-stone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace, unto it[h]!"]

But these monuments were intended also,

2. As memorials of his love—

[The conduct of Israel in the wilderness abundantly shewed, that God had "never set his love upon them for their

[f] Ps. cxiv. 1—7. [g] Exod. xv. 13—17. [h] Zech. iv. 7—9.

righteousness," but solely from his own free and sovereign grace. When therefore they looked upon these stones, they could not but see how greatly he was to be loved, and honoured, and feared, and served, for all the mercy, the undeserved mercy, which he had shewn unto them. They would be ever ready to exclaim, "Who is like unto thee, O God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"

In like manner *we* may see in these stones how effectually God will interpose in *our* behalf, if only we fear and honour him as our God.]

We see what we may expect from him,

*In the time of trouble—*

[We are brought perhaps by God's providence into great tribulation, so that "all his storms and billows go over us." But we need not therefore suppose that he has forsaken and forgotten us: for his word to us is, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel thy Saviour[i]." The greater our trials are, the richer will be the manifestations of his love and mercy: his consolations will abound, not only according to, but far above, all our afflictions. This is the very improvement which the Prophet Habakkuk made of the history before us. He expatiates upon the event, as if he had himself been an eye-witness of it: "I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction; and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots of salvation? The mountains saw thee, and they trembled; the overflowing of the water passed by; the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters." Then he adds, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation[k]."]

We see also what we may expect from him,

*In the hour of death—*

[The passage of the Israelites through Jordan is not improperly considered as an emblem of the Christian's transition from the dreary wilderness of this world to the Canaan that is above. And when the time is arrived for passing by that

[i] Isai. xliii. 2, 3. [k] Hab. iii. 7, 8, 13, 15, 17, 18.

unknown, untrodden path, we are apt to fear lest we should sink in the deep waters, and never attain the wished-for end. But God has promised to be with us, to "make the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over[l]," and to bring us in safety to the land that floweth with milk and honey. "When therefore we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need to fear no evil:" yea rather we may rest assured that "God will perfect that which concerneth us," and "preserve us safely unto his heavenly kingdom."]

IMPROVEMENT—

1. Let us mark, and bear in remembrance, God's mercies towards us—

[There is not any one who, if he had marked the dispensations of God towards himself, might not find many occasions for erecting monuments to his praise: nor is there any thing which will be more conducive to our comfort; since every past mercy may be considered as a pledge of future blessings. The Psalmist's mode of arguing may safely be adopted by every child of God: "Thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before the Lord in the light of the living[m]?" Set up then within your own bosoms an Eben-ezer, whenever God vouchsafes to favour you with any peculiar deliverances[n]: then will you have within yourselves a never-failing source of comfort, and an irresistible incentive to "fear the Lord."]

2. Let us endeavour to transmit the knowledge of his goodness to the latest generations—

[We should encourage young people to seek instruction, and should be glad of every thing that may afford us an occasion of making known to them the wonders of redeeming love. The whole scene of God's dispensations towards Israel, from their first deliverance out of Egypt to their final possession of the promised land, was figurative of our redemption by Christ Jesus: and it is worthy of observation, that this was strongly marked at the commencement and conclusion of their journey. The night before they set out from Egypt, they feasted on the paschal lamb: and they entered into Canaan, forty years afterwards, *four days before* the Passover, that is, precisely on the day when the law required them to set apart the paschal lamb for the approaching festival[o]. Thus was it intimated to them that our redemption from first to last is the fruit of Christ's sacrifice: on that must we feed in order to obtain deliverance; and even in heaven itself must we ascribe the glory of our salvation "to Him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in

[l] Isai. li. 9—11. [m] Ps. lvi. 13. [n] 1 Sam. vii. 12.
[o] Compare Exod. xii. 3, 6. with Josh. iv. 19. and v. 10.

his own blood." Let us then labour to diffuse this saving knowledge, as opportunity shall offer, that our fellow-creatures may reap the benefits designed for them, and God may have the glory due unto his name.]

## CCXLVI.

### ISRAEL'S FIRST PROCEEDINGS IN CANAAN.

Josh. v. 8—10. *It came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole. And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you. Wherefore the name of the place is called Gilgal unto this day. And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the month at even in the plains of Jericho.*

THERE are, in the Scripture history, many important incidents which we overlook, as not supposing them to be capable of any spiritual improvement. To those, indeed, which are directly *typical*, we pay attention, because they are illustrative of the Gospel: but if they command not our respect *in that view*, we rarely consider what great *practical lessons* may be derived from them for the regulation of our conduct. But if, in reading the Sacred Oracles, we were frequently to ask ourselves this question, *What is the state of mind which is manifested in this or that action?* we should gain an insight into many truths which now utterly escape us; and derive to our souls far greater benefit than we can readily imagine. Take, for instance, the conduct of Joshua on his entrance into Canaan. Doubtless it was novel and curious, and such as we should not have expected: but we little think what exceedingly rich instruction it is calculated to convey. To point out this, will be my endeavour at this time. Yet, in pointing it out, I have in view, not merely the elucidation of this particular event, but a general suggestion as to the mode in which the Scripture history may be improved. Let us then consider,

I. The conduct of Joshua on his entrance into Canaan—

God had opened for him, and for all Israel, a passage through Jordan, at a time when it overflowed all its banks; just as he had for Moses through the Red Sea, at the time of his departure from Egypt. Now, therefore,

What should we expect to be the conduct of Joshua?

[Certainly, I apprehend, if he acted on principles which were common to all other Generals, when invading an enemy's country, he would either prosecute his advantage instantly, whilst all his enemies were filled with terror, and crush them before they had any time to concert measures for their defence; or he would fortify his own camp, to prevent surprise, and prepare for carrying on his conquests by such a disposition of his army as his skill in war might suggest.]

But, what is the information given in our text?

[Behold, instead of adopting any military plans whatever, the very day after he had invaded a country in which there were seven nations greater and mightier than his, he appointed every male in the whole nation, that had been born in the wilderness, and consequently that was under forty years of age, to be circumcised. He did not even wait a day, to know what the effect of his invasion should be, or what efforts his enemies were making to repel it; but by one act disabled the greater part of his whole army from even standing in their own defence.

It may seem strange, that Moses, whose own life had been endangered by neglecting to circumcise his son[a], should suffer the whole nation of Israel, who till the hour of their departure from Egypt had observed the rite of circumcision, utterly to neglect it for forty years. Whence this neglect arose, we are not informed: but I conceive, that if in the first instance it arose from the unsettled state of the people till they came to Mount Horeb, and was permitted by Moses for about three months on that account, it was suffered afterwards by God as a just judgment on account of the worship paid to the golden calf, and because of the murmuring of the people at Kadesh-barnea when they were discouraged by the report of the spies who had searched out the land. On the former occasion, Moses brake the tables of the covenant, to shew that the covenant which God had made with them was dissolved; and on the latter occasion, God sware that not a soul of those who had attained the age of twenty at the time of their departure from Egypt should ever enter into the promised land. Being thus disclaimed by God as his peculiar people, they were suffered

[a] Exod. iv. 24—26.

to withhold from their descendants, for forty years together, that seal, by which alone they could be admitted into covenant with God.

But, however the neglect originated, so it was, that not one of all the children of Israel was circumcised for the space of forty years; and all of these did Joshua circumcise, the very day after his entrance into Canaan.

Only three days after this, (for they passed over Jordan on the tenth day of the month, and kept the passover on the fourteenth, at even[b],) did he also enjoin the observance of the passover. The passover had also been neglected, just as circumcision had been[c]: and now that also must be revived, togegether with the attendant feast of unleavened bread. But was this a fit season for such observances? Had not Joshua other matters to occupy his attention? In a time of peace we might well expect that a holy man of God would renew these ordinances: but at the very moment of invading an enemy's country, and within two or three miles of a fortified and strongly-garrisoned city, was this a measure to be adopted? Human prudence, doubtless, would have deferred it: but piety towards God was regarded by Joshua as superseding every other consideration, and as the best means of securing His favour, through whose blessing alone any human efforts could prove effectual.]

Now, instead of passing over this conduct of Joshua as an event in which we have no interest, it will be well to inquire,

II. How far it is proper for our imitation at this day—

Enter into *the state of Joshua's mind at this time;* and then say, whether we may not learn, from his conduct, many lessons for ourselves at this day. We may learn,

1. That, in whatever circumstances we be, religion should be our first concern—

[If ever there were circumstances under which the offices of religion might be postponed, methinks they were those of Joshua on this occasion, when he had but just set foot on the land where great and powerful nations were prepared to combat for their very existence. And, in fact, it is the general opinion of military and naval commanders, that they have, as it were, a dispensation to neglect the ordinances of religion on account of the urgency and importance of their occupations. The same idea prevails through almost all the orders of society,

[b] Compare Josh. iv. 19. with Josh. v. 2, 10.
[c] Amos v. 25. and Acts vii. 42.

every one being ready to plead his temporal engagements as an excuse for neglecting the concerns of his soul. The statesman is too much engaged with politics; the merchant with business; the philosopher with his researches; the student with his books; the servant with his duties; and every man with his own separate vocation: each, in his place, urges his occupations as justifying a neglect of his duties towards God. But, if Joshua, under his peculiar circumstances, sought first to serve and honour God, we can have no hesitation in saying, that in comparison of the divine favour there is not an object under heaven worthy of a thought. I mean not by this to say, that we are at liberty to neglect the discharge of any office to which God in his providence has called us, or so to postpone the discharge of it as to endanger our ultimate success: far from it. It is the inward service of the soul, of which I speak; and which needs not to delay any outward act for one moment. It is not *the act* of Joshua which I propose to your imitation, but *the habit of his mind:* and *that*, I say again, is proper to be exercised by every child of man.]

2. That, in whatever circumstances we be, we should place the most implicit confidence in God—

[Suppose yourself in the presence of Joshua whilst these religious ceremonies were proceeding: you would naturally ask, Are you not in an enemy's land? and have you not many conflicts to maintain ere you can get a quiet possession of it? yet you seem as much at your ease as if the whole land were already subdued before you. What reply do you suppose Joshua would make to observations like these. True, he would say, you behold me in a state of as much quietness and confidence as if I had not an enemy to contend with. But whose battles am I fighting? In whose service am I engaged? Is there any device or power that can succeed against God? In him I trust: and he it is that "keeps my mind in perfect peace[d]." Now, though in respect of *temporal* trials we cannot be sure that we are called to them in the way that Joshua was, in our spiritual warfare we stand, as it were, on the same ground as he: we are called to it, as he was; and it is the way appointed for our getting possession of our destined inheritance. We also have our enemies at hand, enemies with whom, in our own strength, it would be impossible for us to cope. But "our God is for us;" and therefore, we ask with confidence, "Who can be against us?" Though in ourselves we are weak, we may be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Though we have a warfare to maintain against all the powers of darkness, we should never regard it

[d] Isai. xxvi. 3, 4.

as of doubtful issue: we should assure ourselves, that in all our conflicts we shall be victorious, and that "Satan himself shall be bruised under our feet shortly[e]." Already may we look upon the land as ours, and see the crowns and kingdoms there reserved for us. There, *in* and *through* the Lord Jesus Christ, we should consider ourselves as already enthroned[f]; and look forward with joy to the dissolution of our earthly tabernacle, in order to its erection in that good land where it shall be the habitation of God for ever and ever[g].]

3. That, in whatever circumstances we be, we should be determined, through grace, to "roll away the reproach" of our unconverted state—

[The reproach of the Israelites in Egypt was, that they were in bondage both to men and devils: for, whilst they were involuntarily engaged in the service of their Egyptian task-masters, they voluntarily worshipped the gods of Egypt[h]. But behold them now consecrated to God by circumcision, and their reproach was completely rolled away. And is not the unconverted man also both a bond-slave and an idolater? Yes, whatever be the exterior of his deportment, he serves the world, the flesh, and "the devil, by whom he is led captive at his will:" and, whether more or less correct in his outward conduct, he "worships and serves the creature more than the Creator, who is God blessed for evermore." Now then, I say, if you are consecrated to the Lord in baptism, your duty is to rise superior to all your lusts, and to give yourselves entirely to the service of your God. You must also, in remembrance of your adorable Redeemer, be feeding continually on his body and blood, by means of which you are to be strengthened for all your conflicts, and to be "made more than conquerors" over all your enemies. "Christ our Passover being sacrificed for us," your whole life must be one continual feast, which you are to "keep, not with the old leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." It is the reproach of man that ever he was the servant of sin in any degree: and this reproach we are to be rolling away; and, as the redeemed of the Lord, we are to be "glorifying God with our body and our spirit, which are his[i]." To this employment I call you all. I ask you not what your engagements are in life, or what else you have to do: this I am well assured of, that there is not a person under heaven that is not called to this duty; nor is there a circumstance that can be imagined, wherein this duty can be dispensed with. Be ye, then, upright in serving God; and never fear but that God will be faithful in saving you.]

[e] Rom. xvi. 20. [f] Eph. ii. 6. [g] 2 Cor. v. 1. Eph. ii. 21, 22.
[h] Josh. xxiv. 14. with Ezek. xx. 5—8. [i] 1 Cor. vi. 20.

## CCXLVII.

### CHRIST THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST.

Josh. v. 13, 14. *It came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as Captain of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my Lord unto his servant?*

MOST seasonable are the mercies which God vouchsafes to his people. His interpositions for them at the Red Sea and the wilderness, and at their entrance into Canaan through the river Jordan, are ample illustrations of this truth, as is also the peculiar fact recorded in my text. Joshua was now surveying Jericho, which was the first fortress that was to be attacked by him. That he had no fears about success, was evident; because, from his first entrance into the land to that hour, he had acted rather like a person at peace with all men, than as one in the midst of enemies whom he was commissioned to destroy. Still, the visible manifestation of Jehovah's presence with him could not but greatly strengthen his faith, and increase his assurance that every enemy, however powerful, should fall before him.

The points for our consideration are,

I. The character which our blessed Lord assumed on this occasion—

The person who now appeared to him as "a man," was no other than the Son of God himself—

[Many were the occasions on which, at that period of the world, the Son of God assumed either an angelic or human shape, for the purpose of encouraging his believing people. To Abraham[a], and Jacob[b], and afterwards to Manoah[c], were manifestations given similar to that which was here vouchsafed to Joshua. That the person who here appeared to Joshua was more than either man or angel, is clear, I think, from the worship which Joshua, on discovering who he was, paid to him: "Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship." Now, I grant that Joshua might have made a mistake; but if

[a] Gen. xviii. 2. [b] Gen. xxxii. 24—30. [c] Judg. xiii. 6, 22.

he had, it would have been corrected by the person, who, if he had not been God, would not have suffered these divine honours to be paid him[d]. But, so far were these honours from being declined, that the bestowment of them was sanctioned by an express command, similar to what had been before given to Moses. Jehovah, when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush, commanded him to "put his shoes from off his feet, seeing that the place whereon he stood was holy," being sanctified by the divine presence[e]. But indeed, in the beginning of the next chapter, the very person who thus addressed Joshua is called Jehovah: "And the LORD (Jehovah) said unto Joshua[f]." I think, then, that we are in no danger of mistake, when we say that the person who here appeared to Joshua as "a man," was no other than the Son of God himself, the Second Person in the ever-blessed Trinity.]

He, in answer to the question put to him by Joshua, declared himself to be "the Captain of the Lord's host"—

[This, in its primary import, signified that all Israel were under his special protection; and that under his command they might be assured of victory. But the same is true of God's spiritual Israel, in all ages of the world. They are one great army collected under him, and fighting the Lord's battles, in order to a full and undisturbed possession of the promised land. Of these the Lord Jesus Christ is the Head and Chief. He has received a commission from his Father to be "the Leader and Commander of his people[g]:" and whatsoever a general is, or can be, to his army, that is he to all who fight under his banners. Instruction in the use of arms—provision for their whole campaign—encouragement to meet their foes—succour in every difficulty—protection from every danger—and all the rewards of victory, are assured to every one of them, in due season[h] — — —]

Seeing, then, that we have such a Captain, let us contemplate,

II. Our duty towards him under that character—

Doubtless our first duty is *to enlist under his banners:* for we are not his soldiers by nature: yea rather, we are his enemies, and fight against him in every possible

[d] Compare Rev. xix. 10. and xxii. 8, 9. where such a mistake was made indeed, but rectified with holy abhorrence.

[e] ver. 15. compared with Exod. iii. 2—6.

[f] Josh. vi. 2.

[g] Isai. lv. 4.

[h] These several ideas may be somewhat amplified with good effect.

way. But He is held up "as an Ensign to the people; and to him must all people seek[i]." And, as a man entering into the army of an earthly monarch surrenders up himself altogether to the disposal of the general who is placed over him, so must we voluntarily devote ourselves to the service of Christ, before we can be numbered amongst his host over whom he presides. But, supposing this to have been done, then we say that,

1. We must execute his commands—

[Observe the question which Joshua put to him, the very instant he knew the Lord under this character: "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" A similar question was put by the Apostle Paul, the very instant that the Lord Jesus Christ revealed himself to him: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do[k]?" In truth, there is not a soldier in any army who does not look for orders from his commanding-officer from day to day, or who does not feel himself bound to carry them into execution. Now the reading of the Scriptures with diligence will, for the most part, supply the needful information: yet are there many particular occasions whereon we must be peculiarly attentive also to the voice of his providence; and in those instances must we seek, by prayer and supplication, his special guidance, which he has promised to us in answer to our prayers. For instance: in the attack which was to be made on Jericho, nothing was left to the direction of Joshua, but every the most minute particular was given in command from this great Captain. And we also, if we will look unto Him, may expect all needful directions; to which, of course, we must adhere with all fidelity, in order to approve ourselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ.]

2. We must go forth in an entire dependence upon him—

[Soldiers of necessity confide in their commander; and in proportion as is their estimate of his talents, will be, for the most part, their expectation of success. Amongst men, however, this confidence is mutual: for the best general in the universe can effect nothing, if he have not good soldiers to carry his orders into effect. But, in the Christian camp, the confidence must be altogether in the Captain; without whom the most gallant army in the universe must fail. We must be strong indeed, and of good courage: but we must "not lean to our own understanding," or "trust in an arm of flesh." In

[i] Isai. xi. 10. [k] Acts ix. 6.

fact, we are really strong only in proportion as we feel ourselves weak, and look to Christ to "perfect his strength in our weakness[l]." We must therefore be strong, not in ourselves, but "in the Lord, and in the power of his might[m]."]

3. To disregard difficulties, and even death itself, in his service—

[A soldier necessarily expects to encounter difficulties, and to expose his life to hazard in the service of his king and country. And the greater the difficulties which he has to sustain, the more he rises to the occasion; insomuch that, if a service of peculiar danger is proposed, a whole army will vie with each other in their readiness to undertake it. Now, if this be the case with those who have enlisted under the banners of an earthly monarch, shall it not much more obtain amongst the armies of the living God? St. Paul "gloried in distresses and necessities for the Lord's sake:" and the same spirit should animate us also. Indeed, at our very first admission into the service of our Lord we were forewarned, that "he who loved his life, should lose it; and that he only who was willing to lose his life for Christ's sake, should save it unto life eternal[n]." We must "be faithful unto death, if ever we would attain a crown of life."]

ADDRESS—

[Inquire now, I pray you, whether this Saviour be to you a friend or an adversary? He is here in the midst of us, "and with his sword drawn," though we see him not. And to every one of us is he either a friend or a foe. There is no neutrality, either on his part or on ours. Our Lord himself has told us, "that he who is not with him, is against him; and he who gathereth not with him, scattereth abroad[o]." Would you, then, ascertain whether he be a "Captain" unto you? Examine your own hearts; and ask, Whether you have ever enlisted under his banners by a voluntary surrender of yourselves to him; and then, Whether you are habitually regarding his will as your rule, and his arm as your stay, and his glory as the one object of your life? These are points easy to be ascertained: and on them your eternal happiness depends. If these things be true, then will he be a "Captain of salvation" unto you[p]: but if this be not the experience of your souls, then you have nothing to expect, but that he will say concerning you, "Bring hither those that were mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me[q]." Oppose him, and you have nothing to *hope;* submit to him, and you have nothing to *fear*, to all eternity.]

[l] 2 Cor. xii. 9, 10. [m] Eph. vi. 10. [n] Matt. x. 39.
[o] Matt. xii. 30. [p] Heb. ii. 10. [q] Luke xix. 27.

## CCXLVIII.

### THE TAKING OF JERICHO.

Josh. vi. 20, 21. *So the people shouted when the priests blew with the trumpets: and it came to pass, when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.*

THE promises of God, though often delayed beyond the time that our impatient spirits would fix for their accomplishment, are always fulfilled in their season. The period at which God promised to Abraham that he would bring forth his posterity out of Egypt, was at the end of four hundred and thirty years. During the latter part of that time the afflictions of the people increased beyond measure; yet was their deliverance neither accelerated nor delayed: but at the precise period that God had fixed in his eternal counsels, and had revealed to Abraham, even on "the self-same day," they were brought forth from their bondage[a]. They would doubtless have been brought also into the full possession of the promised land if they had not provoked God to transfer to their children the mercies which they had treated with contempt. The space of forty years was allotted for that generation to wander, and to die, in the wilderness. During that time a new generation arose; and to them God fulfilled his word: he led them in a miraculous manner into Canaan, as we have seen: and now began to subdue their enemies before them. The first place which they were to conquer, was Jericho, a city of great strength; the taking of which is the subject for our present consideration.

We shall notice three things;

I. The preparations for the siege—

One would naturally suppose that they would instantly avail themselves of the terror which their

[a] Exod. xii. 51.

miraculous passage through Jordan had inspired; and that, after fortifying their own camp, they would proceed to construct works for the capture of the city. But behold! instead of engaging in any such labours, they address themselves to works of a very different nature, suited only to a season of profound peace.

1. They renew the ordinance of circumcision—

[This ordinance had been entirely neglected in the wilderness; so that, with the exception of those who had not attained the age of twenty at their departure from Egypt, all were uncircumcised. Their first object therefore, after entering into the promised land, was, to renew their covenant with God by circumcision[b]. But was this a time for such an ordinance, when they would thereby disable themselves for war, or even for repelling an assault in case their enemies should attack them? Was it wise, or was it right, to act thus at so critical a juncture? Was it not a tempting of God, rather than a service that could be pleasing in his sight? No: it was commanded by Jehovah himself; and was *therefore* commanded, because God would make them to know that HE was their defence; and, that to mortify sin and surrender up themselves to him, was the surest road to victory. It was not by human policy or strength that they were to prevail, but by *his* care and *his* power: and whatever was most suited to obtain his favour, was most calculated to ensure success.]

2. They keep the feast of passover[c]—

[This ordinance also had been neglected in the wilderness: and, in renewing it, they brought to their remembrance God's gracious interpositions for them at their departure from Egypt, and expressed their conviction, that their whole security depended on the blood of that great Sacrifice which should in due time be offered. How strange does such an occupation appear, when the delay occasioned by it might give time for the arrival of succours to the besieged city! But, to those who know what interest God takes in the welfare of his people, this time would appear to be spent to the greatest possible advantage. And, though *we*, who are not to expect miraculous interpositions, should not be justified in following *literally* the example of Israel on this occasion, yet would it be well if we were more conformed to it *in spirit:* for assuredly, whatever difficulties or dangers we are in, it is our wisdom *first* to betake ourselves unto prayer, and, by renewed exercises of faith on the Lord Jesus, to secure the favour and protection of our God.]

[b] Josh. v. 2—9. [c] Josh. v. 10.

The wisdom of the preparations appears, in that they secured,

II. The fall of the city—

The manner in which it was taken was indeed surprising—

[The armed men were appointed to go round the city in perfect silence[d], once every day for six successive days; and, on the seventh day, they were to compass it seven times. In the midst of this procession the ark was to be carried by the priests, and to be preceded by seven priests with "trumpets of rams' horns," (or rather with the trumpets of jubilee[e],) which they were to sound during the whole procession. On the seventh day, at the seventh time of compassing the city, the army, on a signal given, were to shout: and behold, no sooner did they shout, than the walls on every side fell down flat, opening a ready way of access for the hosts of Israel, and causing the disconcerted men of Jericho to fall an easy prey to their invaders.]

It is also replete with instruction—

[We are not warranted perhaps to speak of this event as *typical:* nevertheless it was doubtless intended to convey most important instruction to all succeeding ages; and to shew to them, how easily God can make a way for the accomplishment of his own purposes, and for the salvation of his own people. If it did not typify, it certainly well illustrates, the victories which the Gospel was to obtain over all the principalities and powers of earth and hell. No human force was used: nothing but the sound of the gospel trumpet prevailed for the subversion of Satan's kingdom. Though preached by men of no education, it proved effectual for the destruction of idolatry, and the establishment of the Redeemer's power, throughout the earth. In like manner at this time it prevails over the lusts and prejudices of mankind: the publication of it is committed to weak and sinful men, who go forth in Jehovah's name to subdue the world to the obedience of faith: and though "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal," nor such as appear likely to be wielded with success, yet are they "mighty through God to the pulling down of strong-holds," and to the "bringing" of, not only the actions, but even "the thoughts, of men, into captivity to the obedience of Christ[f]." As for the weakness of the instruments, God has selected such on purpose, "that the excellency of the power may appear to be of him[g]."

[d] ver. 10.

[e] Rams' horns being solid, would be unfit for the purpose. The other seems the preferable translation. See Numb. x. 1—10.

[f] 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. [g] 2 Cor. iv. 7.

His voice to us is the same in all his wonders both of providence and grace; "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts[h]."]

The next thing which calls for our attention is,

III. The destruction of the inhabitants—

[With the exception of Rahab and her family, for whose preservation the word of the spies was pledged, every human being, old and young, male and female, was destroyed. Even the beasts also of every kind were destroyed, and the whole city was burnt with fire. Nothing was preserved but the silver and gold, and brass and iron, which were to be put into the treasury of the Lord for the use of his sanctuary.

Now in this indiscriminate slaughter we are apt to find occasion of offence, as though we thought ourselves more merciful than God. But were not these people the enemies of Jehovah? and had he not a right to cut them off in any way he pleased? If he had taken them away by an earthquake or a pestilence, or had cut them off, as he did the Egyptian first-born and the Assyrian army, by the hand of an angel, we should have bowed to his sovereignty, and confessed him just: but because he used his own people as the executioners of his vengeance, we are ready to accuse both them and him of inhumanity and injustice. But we are sure that the Judge of all the earth will do right; and that whatever is done by his command is right, whether we can discern the reasons of that command or not. With respect to this particular act, if there was severity in it towards them, there was goodness in it, yea great goodness, towards the world at large: for it has shewn the danger of unbelief and impenitence in such awful colours, that the proudest and most obdurate must tremble. The inhabitants at first were certainly filled with terror and dismay: but probably when they saw for six successive days nothing but an empty parade, they would begin to think themselves secure. At the appointed time however the judgment came; and *that* in a way that they did not at all expect. And thus will it be towards impenitent transgressors. They may imagine that the delay of God's judgments warrants them to expect impunity in the ways of sin: but "when they are saying, Peace and safety, sudden destruction will come upon them as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape."]

From this part of divine history we may LEARN,

1. The excellence of faith—

[What was the principle which enabled the Israelites to manifest such composure in the presence of their enemies, and

[h] Zech. iv. 6.

to forbear the use of all common means either for the preservation of themselves or for the destruction of their enemies? It was faith. And so says an inspired writer; "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days[i]." This is the principle which will carry us through all difficulties, and enable us to triumph over all our adversaries. Under the influence of this, our first care in every situation will be to serve and honour God. In the path of duty, we shall feel no fear about our ultimate success. The means which God has appointed we shall use, and none other. If they appear wholly unsuited to the end, we shall not on that account despond; but shall expect his gracious interposition in his own time and way, assured that He will make the weakest and most contemptible of beings to confound the honourable, and to overcome the mighty[k]. Let us then cultivate this principle, and go forth to our warfare "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."]

2. The benefit of enlisting under the banners of Christ—

[Christ revealed himself to Joshua under the appearance of a man, and professed himself "the Captain of the Lord's host[l]." It was he who directed Joshua how to conduct the siege, and "gave the city of Jericho into his hand[m]." And who but He is "the Captain of *our* salvation?" Who but He can guide us aright in our spiritual warfare, or give us success in it? Truly, if we be made "more than conquerors, it must be through Him that loved us[n]," and gave himself for us. To him will we direct you in every part of your warfare. Do nothing without first asking counsel of him; attempt nothing, but in his strength: and doubt not but that in all your conflicts you shall have reason to say, "Thanks be unto God who hath always caused us to triumph" hitherto, and will "give us everlasting victory through our Lord Jesus Christ[o]."]

[i] Heb. xi. 30. [k] 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. [l] Josh. v. 13—15. [m] ver. 2.
[n] Rom. viii. 37. [o] 2 Cor. ii. 14. and 1 Cor. xv. 57.

---

## CCXLIX.

### ISRAEL DISCOMFITED BY THE MEN OF AI[a].

Josh. vii. 8. *O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies!*

UNINTERRUPTED prosperity is not to be expected in this changeable and sinful world. Even

[a] Fast-day Sermon for disappointments and defeats in war.

the most favoured of mankind must have some trials; nor is there any season when they can presume to say, "My mountain standeth strong; I shall not be moved." If at any time Joshua and Israel might adopt this language, it was immediately after they had entered on the possession of the promised land, and had received an earnest of the complete enjoyment of it by the miraculous destruction of the walls of Jericho. Yet behold, scarcely had they tasted the first-fruits of God's mercy, before a cup of bitterness was put into their hands; which made them regret that they had ever attempted the conquest of the land.

In an attack upon Ai, a detachment of Israelites had been defeated with the loss of thirty-six men: and this filled them all with such terror and dismay, that the whole nation, not excepting Joshua himself, gave way to despondency. Of this we have an account in the passage before us: to elucidate which, we shall notice,

I. The discomfiture of Israel—

Their mode of proceeding to the attack of Ai was far from right—

[Having so easily vanquished a much larger and stronger city, they held Ai in contempt, and concluded of course that God must interpose for them just as he had done in the former case. Hence they say, "Let us send only about two or three thousand thither, and not make all the people to labour thither." Now in this they were guilty of very *great presumption*. To confide in God was right; but to expect his aid, whilst they neglected to use their own endeavours, was highly presumptuous. And what excuse had they; what plea? None, except that they did not choose to *fatigue themselves* with the march. They did not even consult God respecting it; but acted purely from their own conceit. What was this, but to tempt God? And how could they hope to succeed, when acting in such a way?

However favoured any man may have been with divine succour and protection, if he presume upon it, and enter into temptation without necessity, and conceive that because his spiritual enemies appear weak, he shall of necessity overcome them; if he neglect to use the proper means of grace, such as searching the Scriptures and prayer to God, he shall fall: God will leave

him to himself, that he may learn by bitter experience his own weakness, and "no more be high-minded, but fear[b]"— — —]

But their discomfiture was owing to another cause—

[God had forbidden that any one should take to himself any of the spoils of Jericho: but one man, (how astonishing was it that *only* one amongst all the hosts of Israel was found to transgress the command!) tempted by the sight of a costly Babylonish garment and some silver, and a wedge of gold, secreted them for his own use[c]. This sin was imputed to the whole nation, and visited upon them all. God had declared, that, if any such iniquity were committed, the whole camp of Israel, as well as the guilty individual, should be accursed[d]; and now the curse was inflicted upon all; so that if the whole host of Israel had gone against Ai, they would have been discomfited, even as the small detachment was. To this the failure of the expedition is ascribed by God himself[e].

And to what are we to ascribe the calamities inflicted on our nation, the reverses experienced, and the losses sustained, in this long-protracted war? Is it not to our sins, which have incensed God against us? We all acknowledge the greatness of our *national* sins, but forget to notice our own *personal* iniquities; whereas, if we saw every thing as God sees it, we should probably see, that our own personal guilt has contributed in no small degree to bring down the divine judgments upon us. Because we are mere individuals, we think that our transgressions can have had but little influence in matters of this kind: but did not Saul's violation of the covenant he had made with the Gibeonites, occasion, many years afterwards, a famine of three years' continuance[f]? And did not David's numbering of the people occasion a pestilence, to the destruction of seventy thousand of his subjects[g]? But these offenders, it may be said, were kings; whereas *we* are obscure individuals. And was not Achan an obscure individual? Yet behold, how one single act of sin, an act too which would not have been considered as very heinous amongst ourselves, stopped in a moment the course of Israel's victories, and turned them into shameful defeat! Let this point be duly considered in reference to ourselves; and let us learn, that abstinence from sin is an act no less of patriotism, than of piety.]

[b] This is taught us in Phil. ii. 12, 13. which says, "Work, &c. and God will render your efforts effectual: but work, not with self-confidence, but with fear and trembling, because all your strength is in God; and if by pride or negligence you provoke him to withhold his aid, you can never succeed."

[c] ver. 21. [d] Josh. vi. 18. [e] ver. 11, 12.

[f] 2 Sam. xxi. 1. [g] 2 Sam. xxiv. 10—15.

The defeat coming so unexpectedly, we do not wonder at,

II. Joshua's distress—

His conduct on this occasion was by no means unexceptionable—

[*The manner in which he complained to God* reflected even upon the Deity himself; "O Lord God, wherefore hast thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites to destroy us?" Alas! alas! Is this Joshua, that thus accuses the Most High God of cruelty and treachery? Lord, what is man! What will not the best of men do, if left by thee to the workings of their own corruption! Such had been the language of the murmuring Israelites on many occasions: but we readily confess that Joshua, though he spake their sentiments, was by no means actuated by their rebellious spirit: yet he was wrong in entertaining for a moment such a thought. *His distrust of God also* was highly unbecoming; "Would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan!" What, dost thou so readily relinquish the possession of Canaan, because of this single check? Thou art afraid that "all the inhabitants of the land, hearing of this defeat, will be emboldened to environ you around, and to cut off the name of Israel from the earth:" but hast thou so soon forgotten all the wonders that God has wrought in order to bring thee into Canaan, and all that he has promised in relation to the ultimate possession of it? "Is God's hand shortened, that he cannot save, or his ear heavy, that he cannot hear?" "Has he at last forgotten to be gracious, and shut up his loving-kindness in displeasure?" Alas! Joshua, "this is thine infirmity." But it is an infirmity incident to the best of men under great and unexpected misfortunes. We are but too apt to give way to murmuring and desponding thoughts, both in relation to our temporal and spiritual concerns, when we should be rather encouraging ourselves with the recollection of past mercies, and pleading with God his promises of more effectual aid———]

Yet on the whole there was much in it to be admired—

[We cannot but highly applaud *the concern he expressed for the loss of so many lives.* Common generals would have accounted the loss of thirty-six men as nothing: but "the blood of Israel was precious in the sight" of Joshua. We might have expected that he would have blamed the spies for deceiving him in relation to the strength of the city; and have punished the soldiers for cowardice: but he viewed the hand of God, rather than of man, in this disaster: and this led to (what also we much

admire) *his humiliation before God on account of it.* This was very deep: "he rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the even-tide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads[h]." He had seen on many occasions how Moses and Aaron had succeeded in averting the divine displeasure from the people; and, in concert with the elders, he now tried the same means: and we may confidently say, that, if all the hosts of Israel had been defeated, this was the sure way to retrieve their affairs. But *his tender regard for the honour of God* was that which eminently distinguished him on this occasion; "O Lord, what wilt thou do unto thy great name[i]?" This was the plea which Moses had often used[k], and to which God had paid especial regard[l]: and the man that feels it in his soul, and urges it in sincerity and truth, can never be ultimately foiled.

O that such were the disposition and conduct of our whole nation at this time! But alas! we hear of numbers slaughtered, without any emotion. We have fasts appointed; but how few are there who observe them with such humiliation as that before us! It is true, the honour of God's name, I fear, is but little interested in our success: perhaps it is rather interested in the destruction of such an ungrateful and rebellious people as we are. But in relation to his Church and the advancement of religion amongst us, his honour is concerned; because he has bestowed on us advantages equal, if not superior, to any that are enjoyed elsewhere on the face of the whole earth. Here then we may, and should, plead the honour of his name: he expects us to lay to heart the abounding of iniquity in the midst of us; and takes it ill at our hands that there are so few who "mourn for the afflictions of Joseph[m]," and "cry for the abominations of Israel[n]." Let, however, the example of Joshua and the elders be impressed upon our minds, and serve as a pattern for our future imitation.]

IMPROVEMENT—

[Let us not confine our attention to public calamities, but turn it to those afflictions which are personal and domestic. In this history we may behold *the source* and *remedy* of all the evil that can come upon us.

That God, in some particular case, may afflict his people, as he did Job, for the magnifying of his own power, and the furtherance of their welfare, we acknowledge: but yet we never can err in tracing our afflictions to sin, as their procuring cause: and, if only they be the means of discovering and mortifying our corruptions, we shall have reason to number them amongst the richest mercies we ever received———

[h] ver. 6. [i] ver. 9. [k] Exod. xxxii. 12. Numb. xiv. 15, 16.
[l] Ezek. xx. 9. [m] Amos vi. 6. [n] Ezek. ix. 4.

Let us then inquire of the Lord, "Wherefore he contendeth with us?" Let us set ourselves diligently to search out our iniquities; and let us beg of God to discover them to us, that no one sin may remain unrepented of and unmortified.

If in any thing we have been overcome by our spiritual enemies, let us not reflect upon God, as though *he* had tempted us to sin; nor, on the other hand, let us distrust him, as though he were either unable or unwilling to deliver us: but let us humble ourselves before him, remembering that he is still full of compassion and mercy; and relying on that gracious invitation, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely."]

## CCL.

### ACHAN'S GUILT AND PUNISHMENT.

Josh. vii. 19, 20. *And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done.*

THE rise, and progress, and termination of sin, afford as interesting a subject, as any that can be presented to our view. It is exhibited to us by St. James in few words, and with remarkable precision: "Man is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed: then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death[a]." Here we see the whole process: the inward corruption of the heart is first drawn forth by some enticing object; the desire of gratification is then formed, and the determination to attain it fixed. Then comes the act whereby it is attained; and then death, the bitter consequence of sin, inevitably follows. On this passage the history before us is an instructive comment. Achan saw a goodly Babylonish garment, with two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, and coveted them: then he took them, contrary to the divine command; and then the penalty of his transgression was inflicted on him.

In discoursing on this event, we would call your attention to,

[a] Jam. i. 14, 15.

I. His guilt—

This act of his had been perpetrated with so much caution, that it was unperceived by any human being. The consequences of it were felt in the divine displeasure; but what evil had been committed, or by whom, no one knew. How then was it detected? How was the offence brought home to Achan? His guilt must be proved, before he can be punished: nay, there must be two witnesses, or testimony equivalent to that of two witnesses, before he can be put to death[b]. Behold then by what means his guilt was ascertained: it was proved,

1. From unquestionable testimony—

[Though the matter was altogether hidden from man, it was known to the omniscient, omnipresent God. "The darkness is no darkness to him; but the night and the day are both alike." God's eye was upon him, whilst he thought that no eye could see him: and God himself gave the information against him. He declared to Joshua what the true reason was of his displeasure, and of Israel's defeat. But though he revealed *the fact*, he did not name *the person* that had committed it, but left that to be discovered in a way more impressive to the nation, and more merciful to the offender, (inasmuch as it gave him time for repentance and voluntary acknowledgment,) summoning the whole nation, as it were, before him, first, by *their tribes*, that he might point out to which tribe the offender belonged; then, by *their families*; then, by *their households*; and lastly, by *their individual persons*: and thus by four successive lots he fastened upon Achan as the guilty person. Never was there a more striking comment than this on those words of David, "Evil shall *hunt* the wicked man to overthrow him[c]." The offender was out of sight; but his steps were traced with unerring certainty: the first lot shewed, that his scent, if I may so express myself, was found; and, when found, was followed with undeviating steadiness, and irresistible rapidity; till at last the criminal was seized, a lawful prey, a just victim to the divine displeasure.]

2. From personal confession—

[The testimony of God would of itself have been sufficient; because he could neither deceive nor be deceived. But, as it was intended that the offender should be made a public monument of divine justice, and be held up as a warning to the whole nation, it was desirable that other proofs of Achan's guilt should be adduced, sufficient to convince the most scrupulous, and

[b] Deut. xvii. 6. [c] Ps. cxl. 11.

satisfy the most partial. Behold then, Achan himself supplies a testimony which none could controvert or doubt: he bears witness against himself.

Joshua, assured that God had fixed upon the guilty person, entreats the offender to declare openly wherein he had transgressed. And here, we cannot but admire the tenderness of Joshua's address. He insults not over Achan, nor loads him with reproaches; but, as a compassionate father, beseeches him to acknowledge the truth of God's testimony, and to "give glory to him by confessing" his crime. This indeed was known to Joshua, and might have been *specified* by him; but it could not be *proved;* and therefore he wishes to hear it from Achan's own mouth; more particularly as a confession of it would honour God in the sight of all; it would glorify his *omniscience* in discovering, his *holiness* in hating, and his *justice* in punishing the iniquity which had been committed.

Achan, convinced that any further attempt to conceal his guilt would be in vain, confessed it, and *that* too with an ingenuousness and fulness, which would have given us hopes concerning him, if the confession had not been extorted from him by a previous discovery.]

On this testimony, sentence might well have been passed and judgment executed. Nevertheless, that no doubt might remain on any mind, it was further desirable that his guilt should be ascertained also, as it eventually was,

3. From corroborating facts—

[It has sometimes been found that persons have unjustly accused themselves: but it was not so in this case: for Achan, in confirmation of his word, told them where they might find the stolen property. A messenger is sent; the property is found; the proofs of his guilt are exhibited before the Lord and in the sight of all Israel. To this testimony nothing was wanting, nothing could be added. The truth of God was manifest, and the equity of his judgments was demonstrated: and nothing now remained but to execute on the offender the punishment he had deserved.]

Proceed we now to notice,

II. His punishment—

God had before declared that any person who should take to himself any part of the spoils of Jericho should be accursed[d]: and, after the transgression had been committed, he declared that he would no more be with his people till they should

[d] Josh. vi. 18, 19.

have destroyed the accursed person, and every thing belonging to him, from among them[e]. No option therefore remained to Joshua, but to execute the sentence according to God's command.

The sentence, though dreadful, was not too severe—

[Achan, with all his children, and his cattle, were stoned to death, and afterwards, with his tent and stolen property and every thing belonging to him, consumed by fire. Now it is true, that God had expressly forbidden that parents or children should be put to death for each other's iniquities[f]: but God is not restrained by the laws which he gives to man; he may alter or reverse them as he sees good: and in the present instance he was fully justified in the sentence he pronounced. The sin that had been committed, was peculiarly heinous. View it *in itself;* it was a *sacrilegious* robbing of God, who had ordered the gold and the silver to be appropriated to his use in the sanctuary. View it in *its circumstances;* it was committed *immediately after* a most solemn surrender of himself to God by *circumcision and at the paschal feast*, and *at the very instant that God had magnified his power and love* in causing the walls of Jericho to fall at the sound of rams' horns and the people's shout. Had Achan scaled the walls of Jericho and gained the spoils by his own sword at the peril of his life, it would have been some little extenuation of his crime: but God had disarmed his enemies, and made them like sheep for the slaughter: and therefore to rob him of the spoils was the basest *ingratitude.* In a word, it was direct *atheism;* for the very idea that he could hide the matter from God was a practical denial of his omnipresence. View it, lastly, in *its effects;* what evil it had brought upon the whole nation; what a calamitous defeat, accompanied with the loss of six and thirty Israelites; and what inconceivable misery it would have entailed upon the whole nation, if it had not been duly punished, even the entire loss of God's favour, and the utter destruction of all the people. View the transaction, I say, in this light, and the punishment, awful as it was, will be acknowledged just: he who sought in this manner the destruction of every family in Israel, might well be destroyed together with his own family.

If our proud heart still rise against the sentence, let us silence every objection with this unanswerable question, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"]

The execution of it was calculated to produce the best effects—

[It was necessary that, in the commencement of this new scene of things, the people should know what a God they had

[e] ver. 12, 13, 15. [f] Deut. xxiv. 16.

to do with; and that, whilst they learned from his mercies how greatly he was to be loved, they might learn also from his judgments how greatly he was to be feared. This lesson they were now effectually taught: they could not but see that "God is greatly to be feared, and to be had in reverence by all them that are round about him." To impress this lesson more deeply on their minds, an heap of stones was raised over the ashes of this unhappy family; that, as a lasting memorial of God's indignation against sin, it might declare to all future generations, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Now if we consider what incalculable benefit was likely to arise, not only to the people then existing, but to all future generations, from that act of severity, and that the good issuing from it would in many instances be, not merely temporal in relation to their bodies, but spiritual also and eternal in relation to their souls, we shall see that severity to *them* was kindness to *millions;* and that therefore the punishment inflicted on them comported no less with the goodness of God than with the sterner rights of justice.]

That we may gather yet further instruction from the history, let us BEHOLD in it,

1. The deceitfulness of sin—

[Achan at first contemplated only the satisfaction he should feel in possessing the Babylonish garment, and the comforts which the gold and silver would procure for him. The ideas of shame and remorse and misery were hid from him; or, if they glanced through his mind, they appeared as visionary, and unworthy of any serious attention. But O! with what different thoughts did he contemplate his gains, when inquisition was made to discover the offender! or, if at first he thought that the chances were so much in his favour, as to preclude all fear of discovery, how would he begin to tremble when he saw that his own *tribe* was selected as containing the guilty person! How would his terror be increased when he saw his own *family* pointed out! and what dread would seize hold upon him when the lot fell upon his *household!* Methinks, when the different members of that household came before the Lord, it might have been seen clearly enough who the guilty person was, by the paleness of his cheeks and the trembling of his limbs. What now becomes of all his expected enjoyments, when once he is detected? With what different eyes does he view the garment and the money when brought forth before the people, from what he did when first he coveted them in the house of their owner! how glad would he now be if he could recall the act, which had thus brought him to shame and ruin! Thus then will it be with all who violate the laws

of God. The seducer, the whoremonger, the adulterer, the thief, thinks of nothing at first but the pleasure he shall receive in the gratification of his lusts; and congratulates himself on the attainment of his wishes: but he has no sooner attained his object, than he begins to be filled with apprehensions of a discovery: he is carried on perhaps by the impetuosity of his passions; but he is a stranger to peace. Perhaps he silences his convictions, and follows his sinful ways without much compunction: but it will not be always so: there is a time coming when he will view his gratifications with other eyes; or if he be so blinded by the devil as to make light of sin unto the last, his illusions will vanish the very instant that his soul is departed from the body. For the most part, that is found true which is spoken of hypocrites in the book of Job; "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth; yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him[s]." How awfully was this experienced by our first parents! When tempted to eat of the forbidden tree, they thought of nothing but the delicious flavour of the fruit, and the prospect of being made "wise as gods." But they were soon convinced, by bitter experience, that "to regard lying vanities was to forsake their own mercies." Some indeed, by continuance in sin, are become "past feeling, having their consciences seared as with an hot iron:" but death and judgment will speedily undeceive them, and the wrath of an almighty God shall teach them, that "sin was indeed exceeding sinful."]

2. The certainty of its exposure—

[It is profitable to observe how often God interposes to discover the hidden iniquities of mankind. Some sins in particular appear to engage him in more decided hostility against the perpetrators of them. I refer more especially to murder and adultery. The interest which the guilty persons feel in concealing their iniquity makes them as cautious as possible to prevent discovery: yet is their very caution oftentimes the cause of their detection. To such sinners we may almost universally address that solemn warning, "Be sure your sin will find you out." It not unfrequently happens that men are so harassed in their minds, as no longer to be able to conceal their guilt: like Judas, they cast back the wages of their iniquity, and court even death itself, by their own hand, or by the hand of a public executioner, as a relief from the torment of a guilty conscience. But be it so: they hide their wickedness from man: but can they hide it from God? Is there "any darkness or shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may

[s] Job xx. 12—14.

hide themselves?" No: if they go up to heaven, or down to hell, or flee to the remotest parts of the earth, there does God behold them, and from thence will he bring them to judgment. In that day shall the book of his remembrance be opened, and men shall see the records of their own actions. Then shall the proofs of our guilt be exhibited before the assembled universe, and we shall be unable to utter one syllable in arrest of judgment. O that we could realize the thoughts of that day! What a day will it be, when the secrets of all hearts shall be exposed to view, and every hidden abomination be brought to light! Happy, happy they, who in that day shall be found to have an interest in Christ, and in whom his love and mercy shall be for ever magnified! Now since it is certain that our sins will sooner or later find us out, let us consider how we shall view them in that day: and, as we would not *now* commit a scandalous iniquity in the sight of a fellow-creature, lest he should proclaim our wickedness, so let us bear in mind that there is One, "unto whom all things are naked and opened," and who has declared that he "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart." Surely, however skilfully we conceal our abominations now, he will be a swift witness against us in that day to our everlasting confusion.]

3. The awfulness of its award—

[Who does not shudder at the thought of that vengeance which was executed on Achan and his family? Who does not see how hot the indignation of God against sin was, when the sin of one single person prevailed more to incense him against the whole nation, than the innocence of the whole nation did to pacify his wrath against the individual, and when nothing but the most signal punishment of the individual could reconcile him to the nation to which he belonged? Yet was all this but a faint shadow of the indignation which he will manifest in a future world. Surely we should profit from such a history as this: we should learn to dread the displeasure of the Almighty, and to glorify him now by an ingenuous confession, that he may not be glorified hereafter in our eternal condemnation.

Hear ye then, Brethren, what the weeping prophet speaks to us in the name of the Lord: "Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud, for the Lord hath spoken. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness. But, if ye will not hear, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears for the destruction and misery that shall come upon you[h].

[h] Jer. xiii. 15—17.

Blessed be God, though Achan's confession did not avert punishment from him, ours shall from us, provided it be truly ingenuous, and deeply penitential. The Lord Jesus Christ never yet spurned from his feet a weeping penitent. He shed his blood even for the chief of sinners, and "will save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him." But confession on our part is indispensable: his word to us is, "Return, thou backsliding sinner, saith the Lord, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever: *Only acknowledge thine iniquity*[1]." Let us but do this aright, and we shall soon be enabled to say with the Psalmist, "I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."]

[1] Jer. iii. 12, 13.

## CCLI.

### PERSEVERING ZEAL RECOMMENDED.

Josh. viii. 26. *Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.*

WHATEVER instruments God is pleased to make use of, it is by his hand alone that any thing is wrought: and he will be seen in his works. For this end, he has frequently appointed such means to be used, as had, in reality, not the smallest degree of fitness to the end proposed; and which were of no other use, than to direct the eyes of men to him as the true agent, and to constrain them to acknowledge him in the effects produced. The stretching forth of Moses' rod neither had, nor could have, any direct influence in producing the plagues of Egypt, or in opening a passage through the depths of the sea: but it marked, in the most signal manner, the power of Almighty God, who had engaged to accomplish his wonders by those means. Thus it was, that God decreed to give to Joshua the victory over Ai, by the stretching forth of his spear. The Israelitish host had been repulsed before Ai: but now they were ordered to attack it again. Means of every kind were to be used, as if the victory were to be gained by human skill and valour. Thirty thousand men were to be placed in ambush: and a feigned retreat was to be made, in

order to draw the people of Ai from their strongholds, and to seize upon their city whilst they were pursuing the retreating hosts of Israel. All this was well, according to the arts of war: and all this was to be rendered subservient to the end proposed. But still it was not by this that success was to be obtained. Joshua must stretch forth his spear: and, though that could be no signal to direct the operations of his army, (for he was alone, and at a distance from the army,) it was the signal by which, if I may so speak, God would act: for at the moment that Joshua, according to the divine appointment, stretched forth his spear, God stirred up the hosts that were in ambush to execute the concerted movement; and thus a speedy and entire victory was gained[a]. But God would still have it seen that the success was owing to him alone: and, therefore, Joshua must still keep his arm and spear extended, till all the people of Ai were completely destroyed.

Now, in this significant act, Joshua was both a type and an example: and in it we see,

I. How our Great Captain interests himself for us—

Joshua was a very eminent and distinguished type of Christ—

[To him was committed the office of leading God's chosen people into Canaan. Moses might conduct them through the wilderness; but he could not bring them into the promised land. He represented the *Law*, which serves as a rule of conduct, but can give no man a title to heaven. He must give up this honour to Joshua, who was raised up of God for this purpose, to subdue their enemies before them, and to put them into the possession of the promised inheritance. His very name was changed, in reference to his appointment, from Osea to Jehoshua; which is a compound of Jah Osea, and signifies 'divine saviour[b].' His name, thus altered, is the very same with that of Jesus, whose type he was. And no less than

[a] The second night before the battle, Joshua was with the army, arranging the plans of attack: but the night preceding the battle, and the whole time of the battle, Joshua was alone with God in the valley. Compare ver. 9, 13. For the order given by God to Joshua, and its instantaneous effects, see ver. 18, 19.

[b] Numb. xiii. 16.

twice in the New Testament is his name translated "Jesus," when it should rather, for distinction sake, have been translated "Joshua[c];" and both times in reference to his conducting the children of Israel into Canaan. He was the *ostensible* leader of the Lord's people: but the Lord Jesus Christ was the *real* "Captain of the host:" and before Joshua had fought one battle in the land, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in a visible shape as a warrior, and made known to him, that *he* held but the second place, and that the Messiah himself was, in truth, "the Leader and Commander of the people[d]." Agreeably to this appointment, the Lord Jesus Christ is called "the Captain of our salvation[e]," and is declared to be "exalted of God to be a Prince, and a Saviour, that he may give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins[f]." In fact, it is through him alone that any of "the sons of God are brought to glory[g]."]

He was a type of Christ in the very act we are considering—

[He was at a distance from the immediate combatants, and in the presence of his God, with whom he was, no doubt, engaged in fervent intercession for the people: and through him was the victory obtained. To the eye of *sense*, he did nothing; but to the eye of *faith*, he did every thing. Thus it is that the Lord Jesus Christ is gone into heaven, "there to appear in the presence of God for us[h]." There is he "our Advocate with the Father[i]," and never ceases to make intercession in our behalf; and on that very account "he is, and shews himself, able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him[k]." True it is, that we must fight, as if all depended on ourselves: but still it is through him alone that we can prevail: and whoever he be that is finally made a conqueror, he is made so altogether "through him that loveth him[l]:" "God giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ[m]."]

From the same significant action we may see,

II. How we are to engage in combat for ourselves—

Behold the attitude of Joshua, his spear stretched out from the very commencement of the battle to the close. Who sees not in this his determined purpose, and his confident expectation of success? Thus, then,

[c] Acts vii. 45. and Heb. iv. 8.
[d] Josh. v. 14. with Isai. lv. 4. [e] Heb. ii. 10. [f] Acts v. 31.
[g] Heb. ii. 10. [h] Heb. ix. 24. [i] 1 John ii. 1. [k] Heb. vii. 25.
[l] Rom. viii. 37. [m] 1 Cor. xv. 57. and 2 Cor. ii. 14.

must we fight the Lord's battles against our spiritual enemies;

1. With determined purpose—

[A command is given us to destroy them: and, as in God's purpose they are all devoted to destruction, so they must be in ours. No truce is to be made with any of them; not one is to be spared. We have enlisted under the banners of our Lord Jesus Christ; and his battles we must fight, till every enemy is subdued before us. Under whatever discouragements we may fight, we must approve ourselves "good soldiers of Jesus Christ;" never retreating through fear, never fainting through weariness, never relaxing our efforts in any respect, nor ever dreaming of rest, till "Satan and all his hosts are bruised under our feet[n]." The posture of Joshua was no doubt painful to maintain; even as that of Moses had been on a similar occasion, when he held up his rod on the hill in Horeb[o]. His hands were heavy, and he needed the assistance both of Hur and Aaron to hold them up. Through their help, however, he did hold them up till the going down of the sun, and till Amalek was discomfited before Israel[p]. Such resolution must we also possess; and never draw back our hand, till the victory is complete.

The importance of this determination of heart will appear by the effects produced by the want of it in Joash king of Israel. The Prophet Elisha being sick, the king of Israel went to visit him. The prophet announced to him God's gracious intention to destroy the Syrians, his powerful and bitter enemies. The prophet bade him take a bow and arrows; to shoot with an arrow, which should mark the speed with which they should be destroyed; and to strike the arrows on the ground, in token of the extent to which success over them should be obtained. But the king, being but languid in his desires of victory, and not very sanguine in his expectations, smote the ground but thrice; when he should, with determined purpose and joyful confidence, have smitten it five or six times. For this lukewarm conduct he was severely reproved; and his success was limited to the measure of zeal which he had expressed[q]. So shall we find that our success will exactly correspond with the zeal with which we prosecute our endeavours. Let us determine to conquer, and the victory is ours: let our efforts never be relaxed, and they shall infallibly succeed at last[r].]

2. With confident expectation—

[n] Rom. xvi. 20. [o] Exod. xvii. 9. [p] Exod. xvii. 10—13.
[q] 2 Kings xiii. 15—19. [r] Gal. vi. 9.

[It is clear that Joshua entertained no doubts of final success: he was well assured that the event would be such as God had given him reason to expect. It is true, he could see no connexion between his holding forth a spear in the valley, and the success of combatants at a distance from him: to the judgment of sense it would appear, that he would have been better employed at the head of the army, animating and directing his men. But he knew Who alone could give the victory, and that a compliance with God's command was the surest means of obtaining help from him. Hence, without any apprehensions about the issue, he maintained his stand before God, and held forth his spear till all his enemies were destroyed. Such is the confidence which we also must maintain, in all our conflicts with sin and Satan. God has promised us success; and "what He has promised, He is able also to perform." There may appear to us but little connexion between our poor efforts and the destruction of such mighty foes: but we are not to be listening to the suggestions of unbelief; but to "be strong in faith, giving glory to God." We should even now, by anticipation, see all our enemies subdued before us, and the crown of victory set upon our heads. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" should be our triumphant boast: and we should hurl defiance at our enemies, in the name of the Lord of hosts. Though we be only as David, a stripling, with a sling and stone, going forth against Goliath fully armed for the combat, we should know in whom we have believed, and advance as to certain victory. Trusting assuredly in the promise of our God, "we shall not be ashamed or confounded world without end."]

Let me, in CONCLUSION, say to all of you,

1. Think not lightly of the spiritual warfare—

[Every one amongst us has a warfare to maintain. Notwithstanding Canaan is the gift of God, it must be obtained by a manly and continued conflict with our spiritual enemies. The world, the flesh, the devil, are all combined against us, as much as ever the seven nations of Canaan were against God's people of old; and we must go forth against them in the name of our God. We must not despise any as too weak, nor fear any as too strong. Joshua erred in sending only about three thousand men against Ai in the first instance, because the warriors in Ai were but few. His success against Jericho had led him to indulge an undue confidence in the prowess of his men: and he forbore to impose on any greater number what was deemed both by him and them an unnecessary burthen and fatigue. But this unhallowed confidence was punished with defeat: and afterwards he proceeded with his whole force, and with a careful attention to all the stratagems of war. We,

too, must follow him in this respect. There is no enemy so weak, but he will be able to overcome us, if we indulge a careless habit, or confide in an arm of flesh. We must fight the good fight of faith, and quit ourselves like men upon the field of battle: but we must, also, be much and often with our God "in the valley[s]:" there must we be holding forth our hands in prayer; nor must we ever draw them back, so long as one single enemy survives. In this respect we cannot do better than follow the steps of David: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me: fight thou against them that fight against me. Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help: *draw out also the spear*, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation[t]." If you hold forth your spear, and prevail on God to draw forth his, it will be impossible for any enemy to stand before you.]

2. Cease not to prosecute it, till your victory is complete—

[As to "run well for a season only" is the sure way to lose the prize; so to fight, however well, for a season only, will ensure nothing but defeat. You are told, that when Moses' hands hanged down, Amalek prevailed: and it was only by their being held up till the evening, that ultimate success was gained. "Be ye then faithful unto death, in order that ye may obtain the crown of life." "If any man draw back, it is to certain and inevitable perdition[u]." Take the great Captain of your salvation for your pattern: he never ceased from his work, till he could say, "It is finished." Or, if you would have for your pattern a man, who was of like passions with yourselves, then set Joshua before your eyes; and *let his posture in the presence of his God be the continued posture of your souls.*]

[s] ver. 13. [t] Ps. xxxv. 1—3. [u] Heb. x. 39.

## CCLII.

### JOSHUA'S LEAGUE WITH GIBEON.

Josh. ix. 15. *And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live.*

IT is not uncommon for persons to harden themselves against God, and, like Ahaz, "in their distress to trespass yet more against the Lord[a]." The inhabitants of Canaan had been filled with terror

[a] 2 Chron. xxviii. 22.

and dismay even before the Israelites had passed over Jordan: yet they prepared to contend with the invading army, and to repel force by force. But when they saw that a passage was opened for Israel through Jordan, and that the walls of Jericho were thrown down by the sound of rams' horns, and that Ai also was vanquished, it might have been hoped that they would submit themselves to the God of Israel, and endeavour by penitence to avert the impending danger. This however was not the case: on the contrary, the different kings of the country formed a confederacy, to oppose with their united power those whom they despaired of withstanding by their separate exertions. One people indeed ventured to stem the tide: the Gibeonites determined to shun the storm which they could not avert: accordingly they sent some of their chief men to make a league with Joshua.

This league is the subject of our present consideration: and we shall notice it, with a view to,

I. Moral instruction—

Two things in particular require our attention;

1. The deceit they practised—

[The device which they executed was extremely subtle and ingenious. They knew that God had given to the Israelites a command to extirpate the seven nations of Canaan: and they saw by the manner in which Jericho and Ai had fallen, that there was no hope of resisting them with success. They therefore sent some of their chief men, with instruction to feign themselves ambassadors from a distant nation, and in a very submissive manner to entreat that they might not be extirpated also. Whatever terms Joshua chose to impose, they were ready to accede to, provided they might but return to their country assured on the oath of Israel that they should be permitted to live. That their story might have the appearance of truth, "they took old sacks, old and rent leathern wine-bottles, old shoes, clouted upon their feet, and old garments, and, for their provision, bread that was dry and mouldy," pretending that every thing was new when they set out from home, but that, by reason of the length of their journey, it had been reduced to the state in which it then was. They professed a great regard for the God of Israel whom they feared, having heard of all the wonders he had wrought for his people in

Egypt, and of the victorious manner in which he had enabled them to prevail over the kings on the other side of Jordan. But respecting the miraculous passage through the river Jordan, or the fall of Jericho and Ai, they said not a word; because they would have it supposed that their country was so far distant as not to admit of such recent events being known there.

But this falsehood was altogether unjustifiable. It is true, the very existence of their nation apparently depended on it; and to deceive an enemy may in some cases be allowable: but here was falsehood, direct, palpable, systematic falsehood: and, as is usually the case, having begun with one falsehood, (That they were come from a far country,) they were forced to utter a multitude of others to support it. Nothing could justify this: and, if they had been truly pious, they would have preferred death before it. Their better way would certainly have been, to declare the whole truth, and to implore Joshua's intercession with God to spare their lives, and to instruct them in the knowledge of his ways. This, we can have no doubt, would have succeeded, though no provision was made for such an event in the general orders which God had given to Israel. The exception of sparing those who opened their gates related to distant nations only, and not to those within the borders of the promised land[b]. Yet God, as a God of mercy, would have spared them: or, if he had not, it would have been better for them to die, than to preserve their lives by falsehood: for the sentence of God against liars, without any respect to the occasion of their lies, is, that "they shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death[c]."]

## 2. The league that Joshua made with them—

[Joshua, though some suspicion was intimated in the first instance[d], was too easily imposed upon: (for those who are themselves guileless, are least suspicious of guile in others:) he formed his judgment from the circumstances that were before him, and made up his mind without consulting God[e]. This in him was faulty: both he and the elders were guilty of criminal neglect. To what purpose had God given them the Urim and Thummim, but that they might ascertain his will in all doubtful matters? and Eleazar, the high-priest, was at hand; so that no delay would have been occasioned. To the same source may be traced innumerable errors of our own. We "lean to our own understandings," instead of seeking direction from God. To what purpose is it said, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths[f]," if we do not avail

[b] Deut. xii. 10, 11, 15, 16. [c] Rev. xxi. 8. [d] ver. 7.
[e] ver. 14. [f] Prov. iii. 5, 6.

ourselves of this privilege? Let us bear in mind, that there is nothing so great or so small, but it is our duty and our privilege to ask counsel of God respecting it.

But though we blame Joshua for so hastily concluding a covenant with the Gibeonites, we highly applaud him for adhering to his engagement. There might indeed have been much to say for rescinding the covenant: 'He had been imposed upon: they were not the people whom they had represented themselves to be; nor were their cities out of the precincts of the promised land.' Still however, "he had sworn to them by the Lord God of Israel;" and therefore he considered the whole nation as pledged to fulfil the covenant; nor would he suffer the congregation to execute upon them the vengeance which they meditated. This was doubtless the proper line of conduct for him to pursue. If he had rescinded his covenant, the whole people of Canaan would have represented him as a violator of his engagements: it was therefore better to fulfil his hasty and unadvised agreement, than by departing from it to give occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme. From hence we may learn our duty on all such occasions. Joshua had erred through haste, and a neglect of properly consulting God; and therefore it was right to abide the consequences. Had his oath indeed been like Herod's, duty would have required him to violate it; because an engagement to commit murder could not be binding upon any man: but as there was no such obstacle to the performance of his vows in the present instance, he acted the part of an upright man, who "sweareth to his neighbour, and changeth not[g]." Nevertheless it was not necessary that he should go beyond his agreement. All that he had promised, was, to spare their lives[h]: that therefore he adhered to: but as they had deceived him, and as it was necessary to pacify the congregation who were offended at the covenant, he reduced them all to a state of servitude, and made them hewers of wood and drawers of water to the whole congregation in the house of the Lord. This satisfied all parties; and turned even the error which he had committed, into a public benefit.]

Thus have we considered the subject with a view to moral instruction, particularly in reference to *the evil of falsehood, and the importance of seeking direction from God,* and *the indispensable necessity of fulfilling our engagements.* We shall now consider it with a view to,

II. Religious improvement—

[g] Ps. xv. 4. [h] The text, with ver. 20.

It is thought by most commentators that the league made with Gibeon was typical of the admission of the Gentiles into the Christian Church: but without insisting upon that, we may justly deduce from it the following instructions:

1. That we ought without delay to seek the salvation of our souls—

[The Gibeonites did not wait till Joshua had invested their cities, but, whilst he was yet at a distance, sent to desire conditions of peace. They believed that God had given the whole land to Israel, and had ordered them to slay all the inhabitants, and that it was impossible to oppose them with success. They knew also that there was abundant evidence of God's power to execute all that his wisdom had decreed[i]. Therefore they lost no time in seeking to arrest the hand of vengeance, and to obtain life on any terms. Did they then act thus for the life of their bodies, and shall not we for the life of our souls? Have not we as clear evidence of God's determination to destroy all the ungodly, as they had of the gift of Canaan to Israel? and are not the judgments inflicted on the rebel angels, on the old world, on the cities of the plain, and on the Jews themselves at this hour, as clear proofs of God's determination to fulfil his word? I say then, Learn of these heathens: learn to come to JESUS ere it be too late. Stay not till you are besieged by sickness and death; but now, whilst the enemy appears distant, seek a covenant of peace and life. You need not cover your design with falsehoods, but rather declare the whole truth: and come *at first*, as they did *after their imposture was detected;* "Behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do[k]."]

2. That no man shall seek for mercy in vain—

[The Gibeonites, though they obtained mercy by fraud, were spared from a respect for the honour of the God of Israel. Notwithstanding Joshua had been commanded to extirpate all, yet were they spared, when once he had inadvertently passed his word in their favour. And shall not *we* be spared if we apply to the true Joshua? The Lord Jesus to whom we apply "came into the world, *not to condemn the world*, but that the world through him might be saved." So far therefore is mercy from being contrary to the ends of his mission, it is the very end for which he came, that he might "seek and save that which was lost." Nay more, he came not only to spare us, but to bring us into covenant with himself, that we might be numbered amongst his own peculiar people. Hear his own word,

[i] ver. 24. [k] ver. 25.

addressed to every one of us in his name by the Prophet Isaiah; "Incline your ear, and come unto ME: hear, and your *soul* shall *live:* and I will *make an everlasting covenant with you,* even the sure mercies of David[l]." If you are inclined to doubt whether "he will take the children's bread, and cast it to such a dog as you;" learn from the Canaanitish woman, that your unworthiness shall be no bar to your admission to his favour: only, like her, believe in Jesus; and, like her, you shall assuredly find acceptance with him. Moreover, if Jesus once admit you into covenant with himself, not all the universe shall ever prevail upon him to violate his engagements with you. If at any time he appear to frown upon you, you may take his covenant, and plead it with him at the throne of grace; "Do not abhor us for *thy name sake;* do not *disgrace the throne of thy glory;* remember, *break not thy covenant with us*[m]." What astonishing pleas are here! And shall they be used in vain? Had *Joshua* such respect for the honour of God, that he would not violate his inadvertent covenant, and shall not JESUS fulfil the covenant which he has ratified with his own blood? Surely none ever did, or ever shall, make application to him for mercy in vain.]

3. That, if we would obtain mercy, we must submit to the terms imposed upon us—

[The Gibeonites accounted it no great matter to cede their cities, and to spend their days in servitude, seeing that their lives were spared. And shall we think much of sacrificing any temporal interests, or of performing any self-denying duties, when we have reason to hope that God has spared the life of our souls? What if we be called to give up father and mother, and houses and lands, for Christ's sake; should we not "account them all as loss for Christ?" What if we be menaced with cruel torments and death for his sake; should we not say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I may but fulfil his will, and finish my course with joy?" Had the Gibeonites demurred, they had lost the benefit conferred upon them: and so shall we, if we refuse to comply with the terms assigned us; for "whoso loveth his life, shall lose it." If we look for mercy at the hands of Jesus, all that we have, and all that we are, must be the Lord's. Our whole life must be a life of self-denying obedience. Hear this then, ye Gibeonites, who desire a covenant of life and peace: these are the terms, and only these, that can ever be allowed you. But know ye this, that though they may appear hard to flesh and blood, they are not really hard: on the contrary, the service of God is perfect freedom; and it is "better to be a

[l] Isai. lv. 3. [m] Jer. xiv. 22.

doorkeeper in the house of your God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." If then ye have been awakened from your heathenish security, whatever terrors may have brought you to the feet of Jesus, bless God for them: and whatever hardships ye may endure in the service of your Lord, bless God for them also. If only ye submit to God, and take part with his people here, you shall have your portion with them to all eternity.]

## CCLIII.

### JOSHUA'S VICTORY OVER THE CONFEDERATE KINGS.

Josh. x. 24, 25. *And it came to pass, when they brought out those kings unto Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said unto the captains of the men of war which went with him, Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them. And Joshua said unto them, Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong, and of good courage: for thus shall the Lord do to all your enemies against whom ye fight.*

THE Jewish history, considered merely as an history, is the most wonderful, and most instructive, that ever was recorded: but considered as a shadow of things to come, it has an interest peculiar to itself. The attention which it excites, is not that of speculative curiosity, but of practical concern: and every one who desires to obtain favour with Israel's God, feels himself bound to study it, in order to learn from it the character of God, together with the duties and privileges of his chosen people.

Having had frequent occasion, in our discouses on the Pentateuch, to shew, that the figurative import of this history is not imaginary, but real; and that such an explanation of it is strongly intimated in the New Testament; we may dispense with any remarks of that kind at present, and proceed to notice, in reference to the Christian's warfare, the defeat of the five confederate kings by Joshua; a full account of which is given in the chapter before us.

The things which we shall more particularly refer to, are,

I. The occasion of the confederacy—

[The Gibeonites, who were a strong and powerful people, had made a league with Joshua, whilst all the other kingdoms of Canaan were determined to oppose him. This incensed all the other powers against them, especially their nearer neighbours, who considered it as betraying the common interest, and as facilitating the threatened subjugation of the whole country. To prevent the influence of such an example, and to punish those whom they regarded as traitors, five kings united their forces to go and smite Gibeon, before they should be able to obtain any assistance from their new ally. They accordingly went up with all possible expedition to attack the city, and to wreak their vengeance on its inhabitants.

Here then we may see what usually takes place when any of the enemies of Christ submit themselves to him. Their former friends and companions consider it as a defection from their standard, and a dereliction of their cause; and often resent it with no little acrimony[a]: ——— and though their opposition does not in all cases proceed to the same extremity, it never fails to shew itself in a way of contempt and ridicule[b]. Satan too is indignant at losing one of his vassals; and not only stimulates his subjects to commence hostilities against them[c], but labours by all possible wiles and devices to reduce them to their former bondage[d] ——— There is the same enmity against the cause of Christ existing now as ever. As "the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers took counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed[e]," in the days of old, and the same rage continued against all the Apostles and Disciples in after ages[f], so must it be, and so it will be, as long as Satan shall be permitted to exert any influence over the minds of men[g]: earth and hell will combine against the Church of Christ; and every one that enters into covenant with Jesus, shall have a powerful confederacy to contend with[h].]

From the occasion of that confederacy, we proceed to notice,

II. The means by which it was defeated—

[Instantly, and with great importunity, did the Gibeonites make application to Joshua for timely succour[i]. They rightly judged, that, having once made a covenant with them, he would afford them his effectual aid. Nor were they disappointed of

[a] Isai. lix. 15. John xv. 19. Luke xii. 51—53.
[b] 1 Pet. iv. 4. [c] Eph. ii. 2. [d] Eph. vi. 11, 16. 1 Pet. v. 8.
[e] Ps. ii. 2. [f] Acts iv. 1—3. and v. 18, 40. and ix. 23.
[g] 2 Cor. iv. 4. 2 Tim. ii. 26.
[h] Gal. iv. 29. 2 Tim. iii. 12. Eph. vi. 12. [i] ver. 6.

their hope: for Joshua, without delay, gave orders to his whole army, and marched all night to their deliverance.

Such is the way in which Christians also must obtain deliverance. If they attempt to resist their enemies in their own strength, they will infallibly be vanquished: but if they betake themselves to prayer, they cannot but succeed. Prayer calls Omnipotence to their aid: and while it is yet offering, God will both hear and answer it[k]. Behold the Apostle Paul, how sorely he was beset, how grievously he was assaulted: yet scarcely had he been able thrice to repeat his cry for help, before the Lord answered him, "My grace is sufficient for thee:" and immediately you behold him triumphing, as if all his enemies were lying prostrate at his feet[l]. Thus the Christian, whatever confederacy be formed against him, has only to cry unto the Lord for help, saying, "I have no might against this great company that cometh against me, neither know I what to do;" and the victory will be no longer doubtful[m]: the devil himself could not stand before such a prayer as that, but would instantly be put to flight[n]. Joshua felt that there was danger of his coming too late: but no such danger exists in relation to the Christian; for his Lord is always near, a present, "a very present help in the time of trouble[o]."]

Let us next contemplate,

## III. The extent of that defeat—

[The confederate armies were discomfited in a moment, and the pursuit of them continued so long, that Joshua entreated that the sun and moon might be arrested in their career, in order to afford him light to finish the work he had begun[p]. And because the slaughter of them by the hand of Israel was not sufficient, God himself cast down great hailstones upon them, and slew more than all the host of Israel had slain with the sword[q]. All the five kings also were taken, and, after the captains of Israel had put their feet upon their necks, were slain, and hanged up on trees, as accursed monuments of God's wrath and indignation. Thus complete was the destruction of Israel's enemies by Israel's God.

Thus shall the Christian also be enabled to say with the Apostle, "Thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ!" When once he has entered into covenant with Christ, "sin shall no more have dominion over him:" "being Christ's, he shall be enabled to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts:" yea, God will so give him the victory, that "Satan himself shall be *bruised under his feet*

[k] Isai. lxv. 24. [l] 2 Cor. xii. 7—9.
[m] 2 Chron. xx. 12, 15—17. [n] Jam. iv. 7.
[o] Ps. xlvi. 1. [p] ver. 12, 13. [q] ver. 10, 11.

shortly[r]." See the victories granted to David in answer to his prayer: these were a counterpart of those recorded in the text, and of those also which every true Christian shall experience[s].]

It was not for the purpose of insulting over a vanquished enemy that Joshua ordered his captains to trample on their necks, but in order to shew unto Israel, what sentiments this victory should inspire; and to set before their eyes,

IV. The prospect it afforded them in all their future conflicts—

[Many conflicts yet remained for them, before the whole land would be completely subdued. But, however numerous or severe these conflicts might be, the people had no reason "to fear or be dismayed," since every enemy should be subdued before them in like manner, and be, as had long since been foretold, mere "bread for *them*[t]."

In like manner are *we* also taught to regard our victories as pledges of future and greater conquests. Whilst we are in this militant state, we shall find many enemies to encounter. Sometimes they may appear so formidable as almost to defy Omnipotence itself: but we need not fear: there are at all times "more with us than with them:" we shall always have Jehovah himself on our side: and "if God be for us, who can be against us?" Our own weakness is no ground of fear; because God "will perfect his own strength in our weakness:" "instead of breaking the bruised reed or quenching the smoking flax, he will bring forth judgment unto victory." In this light then let us view the menaces and assaults of all our enemies: they shall only be the means of displaying and magnifying the power of our God. Only let us remember that encouraging direction, "Call upon me in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt glorify me;" and then may we rest assured, that "no weapon which is formed against us shall prosper;" yea, we may defy all the powers of earth and hell ever "to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord[u]."]

APPLICATION—

1. To those who put discouragements in the way of repenting sinners—

[Few will acknowledge themselves to be persecutors of the Lord's people, though there is scarcely a more common character to be found. But know, that mocking is as painful

[r] Rom. xvi. 20.
[s] Ps. xviii. 4—10, 16—19, 36—40, 50.
[t] Numb. xiv. 9.
[u] Isai. liv. 17. Rom. viii. 35—39.

to the mind, as scourging is to the body[x]:" and "it were better to have a millstone hanged about your neck, and to be cast into the sea, than that you should offend one of Christ's little ones[y]" ——— If any think, that, because multitudes concur with them, they are the less in danger, I would remind them of Gibeon's enemies, and say, "Associate yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces[z]."]

2. To those who yield to discouragement—

[Think not of your own weakness, but of the power and grace of Christ. And if others cry out by reason of a confederacy, join not with them in their desponding apprehensions, but "sanctify the Lord of Hosts himself, and make him your fear, and him your dread[a]."]

[x] Heb. x. 33. and xi. 36. [y] Matt. xviii. 6.
[z] Isai. viii. 9, 10. [a] Isai. viii. 12, 13.

## CCLIV.

### THE CONQUEST AND PARTITION OF CANAAN.

Josh. xi. 23. *So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes.*

THE promises of God, though often slow in their accomplishment, are sure to be fulfilled in due season. Abraham waited twenty years for the promised child, till, according to the course of nature, there was no hope that Sarah should ever become a mother; yet Isaac was born to him in due time. God promised to give to him and to his posterity the land of Canaan; yet it was four hundred and thirty years before his posterity were brought out of Egypt; and forty more before they entered into Canaan; and even then it was six more years before they obtained a quiet possession of it. Still however, the promise could not fail, nor did it fail in any particular. The accomplishment of that event is recorded in the words we have just read; which will naturally lead us to contemplate the *conquest* and *partition* of the promised land.

I. The conquest of the land—

Beautiful is the analogy between the warfare of the Israelites, and that which is maintained by every true Christian. We have had repeated occasion for this remark before; but the illustration of it admits of endless diversity.

Mark their warfare in its various stages—

[Behold *its commencement:* it began with wonderful interpositions of the divine power in their behalf. The river Jordan opened to them a passage, as on dry land, at a time that it had overflowed all its banks: and the walls of Jericho fell down at the sound of rams' horns, and the people's shout: and thus a footing for them was gained in a way that gave all possible encouragement to their future efforts. In *its progress* they were left more to their own personal exertions. Great combinations were formed against them; and they had sometimes to contend with powers, which seemed likely to overwhelm them[a]: at other seasons they enjoyed comparative rest; yet were they never without some enemies to combat, and some conflicts to maintain. God had told them, that he would "not drive out the Canaanites before them in one year, but by little and little;" that the beasts of the field should not multiply against them, and that their population might so increase as to enable them to occupy the land[b]. Hence, long after the inhabitants of the south were subdued, their northern enemies remained unbroken; and some of their fiercest conflicts were reserved for a period when they had expected nothing but easy and progressive triumphs. Their last trials even seemed to be the greatest; for the Anakims, who were of such gigantic stature, and whose strong-holds were so impregnable as to intimidate all the spies that Moses had sent forty years before to search out the land, maintained themselves to the last, and were never conquered till all the other powers had been rooted out[c]. With the exception of Gibeon, there was not so much as one city that sought peace with Joshua; all of them being given over to judicial blindness, that they might suffer the full punishment of their iniquities[d]. At last, however, came *the completion* of their warfare, when every enemy being subdued, they rested from all their perils and fatigues, and took possession of the whole land. Then they reaped the fruits of all their labours; they occupied all the cities, enjoyed all the spoils, and sat down in peace and safety, none making them afraid[e].]

And now contemplate the Christian's warfare—

[In its *commencement*, the power of God is not less

[a] Josh. x. 5. and xi. 4. [b] Exod. xxiii. 29, 30. [c] ver. 21.
[d] ver. 19, 20. [e] ver. 13, 14.

displayed than in the history before us. The transition which a person experiences in conversion, is justly represented in the Scripture as a coming "from darkness into marvellous light[f];" or rather, as "a passage from death to life[g]." What human power is sufficient for a change like this? St. Paul represents the power displayed in it as equal to that which was exhibited by Almighty God in raising his Son Jesus Christ from the dead, and in setting him at his own right hand in heaven, above all the principalities and powers, whether of heaven or hell[h]. The remembrance of this is an encouragement to the Christian in all his future conflicts. He knows assuredly who it is that "hath begun the good work within him:" he is constrained to say, "I have laboured, yet not I, but the grace of God that was within me: by the grace of God I am what I am[i]." In its *progress* the work is carried forward more apparently by his own exertions. He has the armour given him; but he is called forth to use it. His whole life is to be a state of warfare; and it is by fighting that he is to obtain the victory. He will not find any one enemy that will submit to him, till smitten by the sword of the Spirit, and constrained by the holy violence of faith and prayer. The world, the flesh, and the devil, will combine their forces to destroy him. There will be some seasons of more than ordinary temptation, when he will need peculiar succour from on high: and there will be other seasons of comparative rest: but, if Satan at any time depart from him, it will only be for a season, as he departed from Christ himself[k]. As it is with the Church at large, which has times of persecution and times of peace[l], so is it, in a greater or less degree, with all the individuals that compose the Church: and not unfrequently has the Christian his sorest trials, either when he is most expecting peace[m], or when his last enemy, even death itself, is about to be swallowed up in everlasting victory[n]. At last the *completion* of his warfare will arrive: O blessed season, when every enemy shall be finally subdued! Then the almost invincible Anakims shall be rooted out; and Satan, that great adversary, by whom all the rest are concentrated and led on to battle, shall be bruised under his feet; and he shall enjoy the fruit of his victories in everlasting rest.]

The same resemblance as we have traced in reference to the conquest of Canaan, may yet further be discovered in,

II. The partition of it—

The land, when conquered, was divided to the

[f] 1 Pet. ii. 9. [g] 1 John iii. 14. [h] Eph. i. 18—22.
[i] 1 Cor. xv. 10. [k] Luke iv. 13. [l] Acts ix. 1, 31.
[m] Job i. 10. 2 Cor. xii. 2, 7. [n] 1 Cor. xv. 54.

tribes by lot; God having reserved to himself the whole disposal of it: his it was from the beginning; and his it continued to be; and they must all receive it as a gift from him. Mark here *the order of events;*

1. The grant—

[God gave the land to Abraham, whom of his own sovereign will he had called out from an idolatrous people, and to whom for his own glory's sake he had revealed his will. To him, I say, God gave the land; not for any merit that was in him, either seen or foreseen, but, "for the manifestation of his own glory." And whence is it that man is taken, in preference to the fallen angels? or whence are Christians selected from the whole world, which lieth under Pagan darkness or Mahometan delusion? or whence are some "recovered out of the snare of the devil, by whom they have been led captive at his will," whilst others are left still in bondage to him, wallowing in their lusts, and enemies of all righteousness? Will any man presume to say that he "made himself to differ[o]," or that God chose him for his own superior goodness, either seen or foreseen[p]? Let not that man ever speak of pride; for wherein could Lucifer himself exceed such presumption as this? No: we must affirm with the Apostle, that "God hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world; and *that*, not because we *were* holy, or because he foresaw we *would be* holy, but that we *might be* holy, and without blame before him in love[q]." He, of his own sovereign will, gave his Son to us, and us to him[r]; yea, he "predestinated us also unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the Beloved[s]."]

2. The acquisition—

[This, though a gift, was yet attained by means of their own exertions. The common objection against the doctrines of predestination and election is, that it encourages men to sit down supinely, expecting God to do every thing, whilst they themselves do nothing. But did Joshua and Caleb argue so; or was there found one single person in the whole kingdom of Israel that argued so? No; they all knew that the gift of

[o] 1 Cor. iv. 7.

[p] Deut. ix. 4—6. Even such a *thought* is reprobated; and how much more such an assertion!

[q] Eph. i. 4. [r] John xvii. 6, 9, 10.

[s] Eph. i. 5, 6. It is not expedient to be always harping upon this subject; but we must not be ashamed of it, or afraid on proper occasions to confess it.

Canaan did not supersede the necessity of their exertions, nor did the efforts they used prevent it from being a gift. They knew that it was a gift; and that very consideration encouraged them to fight for it; and they laboured cheerfully, because they "knew that their labour would not be in vain in the Lord." Thus then it must be with us. "The covenant whereby heaven is made over to us, is ordered in all things and sure:" yet we must "fight the good fight of faith" and "quit ourselves like men," if ever we would enjoy any one of its blessings. It is "to those who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, that eternal life will be given[t]:" nor is there one single hour on this side eternity when we are at liberty to put off our armour: we must "be faithful unto death, if ever we would obtain the crown of life." The will of God is made known to us: every assistance is offered for the performance of it: in obeying it we must find our present happiness, and ensure that which is to come. This order of things is absolutely irreversible: "we have need of patience therefore, that, *after we have done the will of God*, we may receive the promise[u]."]

3. The enjoyment—

[This, though long delayed, they attained at last; and doubtless considered themselves as well repaid for all their labours. But what was their rest in comparison of that which God has reserved for us? Of ours David speaks, when he represents God as swearing that the impenitent and unbelieving shall never enter into it: and in the Epistle to the Hebrews, this declaration of David's is brought to prove, that there must be some other, and better, rest than ever was enjoyed in this world. The rest which Joshua promised and gave to Israel in the land of Canaan, was only a type and shadow of that which God has prepared for us: "If Joshua had given them rest," says the Apostle, "David would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth *therefore* a rest to the people of God[x]." Now here the whole parallelism which we have illustrated, is marked by God himself. Their Captain has the very same name with ours, and was a most illustrious type of him: and the rest of Canaan which he gave them after all their conflicts, was a distinguished type of heaven; to the everlasting possession of which we shall be advanced, when, under the direction, and by the aid of Jesus, we have subdued our spiritual enemies. Then all difficulties, temptations, trials, conflicts, will be for ever banished; and rest in the bosom of our God will be our everlasting portion.]

[t] Rom. ii. 7. [u] Heb. x. 36.

[x] Heb. iv. 7—9. In ver. 8 the name "Jesus" should be translated "Joshua." They are both the same word in the Greek.

Let us LEARN then from hence *the issue,*

1. Of the world's impieties—

[God beareth long with sinners; and because his judgments against their evil works are not executed speedily, their hearts are the more fully, and more securely, set in them to do evil. But "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness." He has fixed a period beyond which his forbearance shall be exercised no longer: and then the most secure shall be visited, and the most powerful brought down. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." O that the secure and thoughtless would reflect on this, ere it be too late! Hostility to Jesus and his people, whatever men may imagine, can never terminate, but in the destruction of those who indulge it. Beware then, Brethren, of hardening yourselves against God: for "who ever hardened himself against him and prospered?" His hand will surely find out all his enemies; and every refuge of lies shall be swept away with the besom of destruction.]

2. Of the saint's conflicts—

[Victory may in some cases be long held in suspense: and the most courageous veteran may need peculiar comforts from above. But the weakest shall triumph in due time; and be made "more than conquerors through Him that loved them." We readily grant, that, as the Israelites had to contend with "nations that were greater and mightier than they," so it is with us: but the issue of our conflicts shall be like theirs also. It is said on different occasions, that "God delivered their enemies into their hands;" and from thence the victory became certain. The same promise has he made to us; and it shall be fulfilled to every one of us in its season. Let not any then give way to unnecessary alarms. Appearances may be awful and alarming: but our consolation is, that "greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world:" and, if at any time we be tempted to say, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" let us instantly reply with the holy Apostle, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"]

---

## CCLV.

### SLOTH AND LUKEWARMNESS REPROVED.[a]

Josh. xviii. 3. *And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?*

CONSISTENCY in religion is by no means an easy attainment. Certain duties may be performed

[a] For New Year's Day.

with zeal, whilst others of a more difficult and self-denying nature are shamefully neglected. We admire and applaud the conduct of "the whole congregation of Israel" in relation to the tabernacle, which with one consent they "set up for the Lord in Shiloh," as soon as ever "the land was subdued before them." This mark of respect and gratitude, of love and devotion, was due to God in the first place: but should we not have expected, that they would immediately go on to complete the work which God had assigned them, and which they had almost brought to a successful termination? Yet behold, there were no less than seven tribes out of the twelve, who had not yet received their inheritance, and who manifested a most criminal indifference respecting the possession of their appointed portion. This negligence Joshua reproves in the words which we have read: for the elucidation of which we shall shew,

I. The force of the reproof as applied to them—

God had given them the land, and had so far subdued the inhabitants before them, that little remained but to go and take possession of the whole country. But they delayed, and their neglect brought a just reproof upon them;

1. For their indolence—

[It is manifest that they gave way to an indolent and slothful spirit, which kept them from making the exertions necessary for the acquisition of their respective lots. Now this is an habit which we are all too apt to indulge, and which has a most injurious effect wherever it prevails. Solomon speaks of it as rendering a man averse to the most necessary duties, insomuch that "his way is always like an hedge of thorns" that makes his every motion difficult and painful[b]. Hence he is impoverished; "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing[c]:" even the attainments he has made are rendered unprofitable to him through the influence of this corrupt principle: "he roasteth not that which he took in hunting[d]:" in fact, as Solomon further observes, "The desire of the slothful killeth him[e]." Now to yield to this principle at any time is very reprehensible; but under *their* circumstances, when God

[b] Prov. xv. 19. [c] Prov. xiii. 4. [d] Prov. xii. 27. [e] Prov. xxi. 25.

had done so much for them, and there remained so little for them to do, it was highly criminal.]

2. For the undue satisfaction they took in their present comforts—

[Doubtless their present state formed a great contrast with that which they had experienced in the wilderness; for they enjoyed all the rich provisions which had been treasured up for the use of the former inhabitants. But, because they were at present possessed of such abundance, they were unmindful of that which was destined for their future and permanent support. Thus it frequently happens, that a present portion diverts men from the pursuit of an ulterior object, which would have more richly compensated their continued labours. Not that we mean to decry *moderation;* for, when it is seated in the *desires* without impeding our *actions*, we consider it as a distinguished virtue: but where a partial attainment of what is truly good, renders us indifferent to the fuller possession of that good, we regard that as an abuse of God's goodness to us, and a perversion of what he designed for our encouragement. In the Israelites it argued base ingratitude to God, and was a very shameful method of requiting all his kindness to them.]

3. For the light thoughts which they entertained of their promised inheritance—

[It is evident that they did not regard it in the exalted light in which God had represented it to them: they thought but little of it as an inheritance assigned to them by the Deity, and still less as a type and emblem of that glorious inheritance reserved for his people in a better world. In this respect they are followed by the whole race of mankind. God bestows innumerable blessings on us, to lead up our minds to Him who gave them, and to stimulate us to the pursuit of far higher blessings: but we view these mercies only as they conduce to our present comfort, and entirely overlook the intention of the Donor: yea, we scarcely ever begin to think of spiritual benefits, till he has either withdrawn, or embittered to us our carnal enjoyments. In Israel, this conduct was peculiarly criminal, because the possession of this land had been promised to Abraham so many hundred years before, and had constituted the chief encouragement to the whole nation to devote themselves unreservedly to the service of Jehovah.]

The reproof however must not be confined to them; we must acknowledge,

II. The justice of it as applied to ourselves—

God has given to us a better inheritance, even heaven itself: and much has he done for us, in order

to bring us to the possession of it. We speak not now of those who are yet "in darkness and the shadow of death," but of those who have been "brought out of darkness into marvellous light:" yes, to the greater part of them is this reproof pre-eminently due. Let it only be considered how "slack" the professors of religion almost universally are in the pursuit of heaven; how slack, I say,

1. In reading the Scriptures—

[The sacred volume contains, not only the will which makes over to us the grant of this inheritance, but the title-deeds themselves, yea, a map also of the whole estate, a description of every thing that is valuable in it, and clear directions for securing to ourselves the everlasting possession of it. Now I would ask, What would be our employment, if such a document were put into our hands in reference to an earthly inheritance; especially if we were called to make out our title to it, and our ultimate enjoyment of it depended on proofs to be adduced from the records themselves? Should we not diligently apply ourselves to those records without loss of time? Should we not call in professional aid, and use every possible effort to establish our right? Should we find ourselves at ease whilst the issue of our exertions was doubtful? or should we waste our time in unprofitable pursuits, and thereby endanger the ultimate loss of our property through the craft and subtlety of an envious adversary? We all know how we should feel and act on an occasion like that. But how do we act in reference to *the inspired volume?* (I speak not of those who entirely neglect the Bible; their conduct speaks loudly for itself: I speak of those who do occasionally read the Scriptures.) Do we search that blessed book with half the interest that we ought? Do we mark every thing in it that can assist us either in discovering our title to heaven, or in securing the attainment of it? Let us ask ourselves, whether we do not often find less interest in it than in a common newspaper? and, though for conscience sake we read a portion of it every day, we find it oftentimes only a dead letter, and a sealed book, from whence we derive no real benefit. Does not *this* then shew how justly the reproof of "slackness" may be applied to *us?*]

2. In prayer—

[Prayer is that which brings down aid from above, and tends, more than any thing else, to the furtherance of the work of God within us. But O! what a poor, cold, formal service is prayer in general, even among those who profess to be looking for the enjoyment of heaven! But, what if we were

professing great anxiety to reach a destined port, and yet carried no more sail than was just necessary to keep the vessel's head towards it; and every storm threatened to drive us out of our course; and it was often doubtful whether the currents had not a more powerful influence to counteract our design, than the wind to further it; would any one believe that we were in earnest? It is by prayer that we catch the heavenly gales, and are advanced towards the land which we pretend to seek: let conscience say then, whether we carry the canvass which we might; or whether our secret aspirations justify our outward professions. Who amongst us, in the view of these holy duties, does not even reproach himself, and almost doubt his own sincerity?]

3. In the mortification of sin—

[In this we particularly resemble the Israelites of old. Because the armies of Canaan were no longer formidable to them, they overlooked the scattered remains which still occupied many strong-holds, and considered them as unworthy of their notice. And is it not thus with too many amongst ourselves? We are not any longer tempted to the commission of gross, open, scandalous iniquities; and therefore we rest satisfied with the victories we have gained, instead of prosecuting them to the utter extirpation of our indwelling corruptions. Look at many professors of religion: they will not be guilty of palpable dishonesty; yet will harbour covetous and worldly desires: they will not commit whoredom or adultery; yet will indulge much impurity in their imaginations. See the various parties in the Church: instead of exerting all their powers against their common enemy, they can waste their time in contending with each other: and even those who are united in the same Church too often weaken each other's hands by mutual disagreements, instead of edifying each other by fervent love. Do not these things shew, how lukewarm we are in the prosecution of our best interests? Were we in earnest, as we ought to be, we should account sin our only enemy; and the extirpation of it would be the one labour of our lives.]

4. In pressing forward for the prize of our high calling—

[This distinguished the great Apostle of the Gentiles; he "forgot the things which were behind, and reached forward for that which was before:" and, after his example, we should account nothing attained, as long as any thing remains to be attained: we should consider victories only as steps to future conquests; and think it time enough to rest, when every enemy, even death itself, has been put under our feet. Instead of dreading the dissolution of our earthly tabernacle, we

should groan for it, desiring to be dissolved, that we may be with Christ; yea, we should be "looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of Christ," when our sanctification will be perfect, and our triumph complete. But, how far is this from being the experience of the generality of Christians! We seem to cleave to life, as if a state of pain and conflict were preferable to that of rest and happiness. Alas! alas! we live far below our privileges: whereas, if we were as heartily engaged in the work of our salvation as God requires us to be, we should manifest in our very countenances the radiance of God's image, and bear about in our souls the felicity of heaven.]

That we may give more effect to this reproof, we will set before you,

III. The considerations which are proper to stir us up to diligence—

Consider,

1. How much time you have lost already—

[What attainments might we not have secured, if, from the commencement of our warfare, we had made no truce with our enemies, but had followed up our advantages with becoming zeal! — — — Many may look back for years, and yet be scarcely able to point out one foot of ground that they have gained, beyond that which was ceded to them in their first conflicts. But we must not forget, that it is not he who begins well, but "he that endureth to the end, that shall be saved."]

2. How your difficulties are increased by delay—

[Forty years after this time, the tribe of Dan had yet to fight for their inheritance[f]; and it was four hundred years before the Jebusites were driven from Jerusalem[g]. Had all the tribes proceeded with united vigour to fulfil the divine command in its utmost extent, they would not so long have had to lament that their remaining enemies were as "scourges in their side, and thorns in their eyes." And who does not find, that corruptions gather strength by indulgence, and that graces decay for want of exercise? "Look then to yourselves, that ye lose not the things that ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward[h]."]

3. How certain is your success, if ye advance in your work—

[The promise and oath of Jehovah are on your side. If there were any room for doubt respecting the ultimate success of your labours, there would be some little excuse for lukewarmness: but when victory is sure, methinks the most timid person

[f] Judg. xviii. 1. [g] 2 Sam. v. 6—8. [h] 2 John, ver. 8.

in the universe should not fear the conflict, nor the weakest hesitate to put forth his strength. Go on then without fear; and "ye shall never fall, but so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ[i]."]

4. How richly heaven will compensate for all your labours—

[What was Canaan, in comparison of the rest that is above? It is no uncommon thing for the ungodly to find fault with the Lord's people as too strict, and to dissuade them from the exercise of so much zeal in the cause of Christ: but what would they think, if, like Paul, they were caught up to the third heavens, and beheld for a single hour those blest abodes? Would they think us then too much in earnest? Would they not rather stand amazed at the lukewarmness of those, whom they now condemn as "righteous overmuch?" They themselves cannot but feel the full force of this appeal: much more must you who are engaged in the service of the Lord, be well convinced, that "it is good to be zealously affected always in a good cause." To you therefore we say, as the spies did to the neglectful Danites, "We have seen the land, and behold, it is very good: and are ye still? Be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land[k]."]

[i] 2 Pet. i. 10, 11. [k] Judg. xviii. 9.

## CCLVI.

### THE DISBANDING OF THE TROOPS OF ISRAEL.

Josh. xxii. 4, 5. *Now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side Jordan. But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

THE duties of soldiers and of their commanders are well illustrated in this passage. The soldier's chief excellence is a prompt, steady, persevering, uniform obedience to the commands of his superiors, without regarding any difficulties, any dangers, any sacrifices: and amongst the chief excellencies of a commander is an attention to the spiritual and eternal interests of those who are under his authority.

The Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassites, had received their portion on the other side of Jordan on the express condition, that a just proportion of their tribes should pass over Jordan to fight in concert with the other tribes, and not return unto their inheritance till the whole land should be subdued. This they had done; and now that they were about to be disbanded, Joshua acknowledges to their honour, that "they had kept all that Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded them, and had obeyed *his* voice also in all that *he* had commanded them." But whilst he commends them for their fidelity to *him*, he endeavours to impress upon their minds a sense of duty and allegiance to God; and enjoins them to "take diligent heed to serve the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul."

From this parting exhortation we are led to remark,

I. That a progress in holiness is above all things to be desired—

[Had Joshua merely judged it proper to insert an admonition relative to their religious duties, one or two expressions would have sufficed: but from the multitude of expressions used in the text, we see of what unspeakable importance he considered religion to be to every child of man. He not only mentions the subject first in general terms, that "they should do the commandment and the law," but enters particularly into it: they must have, as *the principle* of their obedience, *the love of God:* the *extent* of it must be to *all* God's ways: and, as to *the manner* of it, they must cleave to him with an unalterable determination of *their wills*, and the most ardent exercise of *their affections* ——— This is holiness; but nothing short of it will suffice. We do not say that the Christian must be *perfect:* for where should we then find a Christian? but he must aim at perfection, and be continually pressing forwards for the attainment of it. This was the great object of Joshua's solicitude both for himself and his soldiers: this was the great end for which our Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross, even "to purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works:" and this must be the one object for which we should desire to live.]

II. That, whatever progress any person may have made, he still needs to hear words of counsel and exhortation—

[The soldiers whom Joshua was disbanding had continued with unshaken fidelity to fulfil their engagements: and though they had been detained from their families and possessions for seven years, they never once murmured or repined at the delay: yet Joshua did not on that account think that his religious counsels to them were superfluous. Nor should the most established Christian imagine himself to be beyond the reach of danger, or to have attained such eminence as not to need every possible help for his furtherance in the divine life. St. Peter, writing to those to whom "the divine power had already given all things that pertained to life and godliness," says, "I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." And indeed the counsel in our text intimates, that, in order to do the commandments, we must "take heed," yea, "take *diligent* heed" to them; so many are our temptations to violate them, and so averse are we by nature to observe them——— In a general way, the truth of these observations will be thought so obvious, as that they scarcely deserved a mention: but experience proves, that they need to be insisted on with all possible earnestness: for, whilst the professors of religion depart from open iniquity, there is in every one of them some besetting sin, which they are prone to cherish and indulge. Moreover, their blindness with respect to that sin is most astonishing: for, not only are they unconscious of its domination, but they are even ignorant of its existence in them; and not unfrequently do they give themselves credit for that *as a virtue*, which others see to be their *greatest defect*. How blind are men to their pride, their vanity, their worldliness! How often does an angry and bitter spirit habitually prevail in men, who never mourn over their unchristian tempers, or appear even to be aware of them!——— We call upon all then to "be jealous over themselves with a godly jealousy;" and to hear the exhortations of the Gospel with an especial reference to themselves, searching out their own *spirit*, and striving to attain the full "*mind* that was in Christ Jesus."]

## III. That a state of peace and prosperity is a season of peculiar danger—

[Now the disbanded soldiers were returning to the bosom of their families, and the peaceful prosecution of their worldly business: and, as Moses had long since warned them, they were in danger, whilst enjoying "houses which they built not, wells which they digged not, and vineyards which they planted not; they were in danger, I say, of forgetting the Lord their God." And who does not feel how apt the mind is to yield to the pleasures of sense, and to relax its ardour in the pursuit of heavenly things, when it has no trials or troubles to stimulate

its exertions? Visit the chambers of sickness, and of health; and see how different the same persons are under the two different states! View persons under painful bereavements, and see them afterwards in the full enjoyment of all earthly comforts! Truly, if we regarded heavenly things only, we might rather congratulate men on troubles than on the absence of them, and account prosperity their greatest snare. To all then who are looking forward to any worldly acquisitions or comforts, or who are now living in the possession of them, we would urge with peculiar earnestness the necessity of vigilance, lest having "begun in the Spirit, they end in the flesh." Hear the exhortation of an inspired Apostle: "Follow holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; *looking diligently*, lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled[a]:" there you may see the hidden nature, the growing tendency, the baneful effects of sin; its effects in the heart, the Church, the world ——— O that we may be ever on our guard against its secret workings; and most of all on our guard, when ease and prosperity are administering opiates to our souls!]

"Suffer ye then, Brethren, a word of EXHORTATION[b]"—

[When ye are released from your present warfare, and are dismissed to your eternal inheritance, ye will be beyond the reach of sin: in the bosom of your God your holiness and felicity will be complete. But, as long as you are in this world, you will need to have every word of Joshua's injunctions repeatedly enforced. See then to it that you "love the Lord your God," who has redeemed you from sin and Satan, death and hell ——— See that, from a sense of love to him, and his love to you, your obedience be carried to its utmost possible extent; and strive to "be perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" ——— And, since it is certain that you will find many things to draw you away from him, mind that you "cleave to him with full purpose of heart," "abhorring that which is evil, and cleaving to that which is good" ——— Lastly, let all your affections centre in Him, and in his ways: let "your whole heart and your whole soul" be engaged in his service; and let the delight which you experience in fulfilling his will, be manifested, "not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth;" so that your bitterest enemy, or most watchful observer, may have no room to doubt either the excellence of your principles, or the reality of your attainments.]

[a] Heb. xii. 14, 15.

[b] Heb. xiii. 22. If this were on the occasion of *disbanding troops*, the commendation given by Joshua, as well as his exhortation, should, as far as was applicable, be insisted on.

## CCLVII.

### THE ALTAR OF WITNESS.

Josh. xxii. 11, 12. *And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them.*

RELIGION has often been made a plea for ambitious and bloody projects: but it never was on any occasion so truly and properly the ground of war, as in the event that is here recorded. The tribes who had their portion on the east of Jordan, after having been disbanded, came to the land of their possession: and, apprehending that at some future period they might be disowned by their brethren on account of their not having their inheritance in the land of Canaan, they built a large altar on the borders of their own land near Jordan, to serve as a memorial to all future ages, that they belonged to the tribes of Israel, and were the worshippers of Israel's God. The other tribes having no conception of an altar being erected but for sacrifice, regarded this as an act of rebellion against God, and determined instantly to go and punish the supposed apostates. But first they agreed to send an embassy, to see whether they could not prevail by milder methods to reclaim them from their wickedness. The ambassadors went; a convention met; an explanation took place; the misapprehensions were removed; and all was speedily and amicably settled.

Now this history will suggest many useful hints for the regulating of,

I. National interests—

[The question was, in fact, of infinite importance to the whole nation. Repeated occasions had arisen wherein the sin of individuals had been visited upon the whole nation. The iniquity of Achan had not long since caused the defeat of Israel's

hosts, and the loss of six and thirty men: and, not very long before, the connexion of many with the Midianitish women in whoredom and idolatry, brought destruction on twenty-four thousand Israelites in one day. What then could be expected, but that, if these who had erected the altar should pass unpunished, God would punish all the other tribes as partners in their guilt? To avert so terrible an evil was *their* bounden duty; and therefore they acted right in determining to avenge the quarrel of their God. But, as it was possible they might prevail by gentler means, they sent delegates from every tribe, with Phinehas at their head, to expostulate with them on their conduct. These were met by other delegates from the supposed offenders, and every thing was cleared up to their satisfaction: and thus the controversy was terminated to the unspeakable joy of all parties.

Now in this we see how nations ought to act, whenever grounds of disagreement arise, and their mutual interests interfere. Their ambassadors should confer with each other in a conciliatory manner, anxious to prevent extremities, and, by mutual explanations and concessions, to adjust their differences. One thing in particular was worthy of applause in those who seemed disposed for war: they were intent only on the prevention of iniquity; and, imagining that the altar had been raised with a view to put the land of Gilead on a footing of equality with the land of Canaan, they offered to give up a proportionate share of their own land to those who had erected it, and thus to sacrifice their own interests for the preservation of peace. Alas! how different is this from what is usually found amongst contending nations! Modern embassies are most frequently characterized by duplicity and concealment, by chicanery and finesse, and by a wanton pertinacity about matters of inferior moment. Were all actuated by the spirit of Israel on this occasion, were frankness on the one side met by patience and conciliation on the other, the earth would be no more deluged with blood, but the "swords would be beaten into ploughshares," and happiness would reign, where nothing but desolation and misery is seen.]

But this history will be further useful for the regulation of,

II. Judicial policy—

[This act was in reality an enforcing of the existing laws under the direction of the civil magistrate: for, though Joshua is not mentioned, we can have no doubt but that Phinehas and the ten princes had received his sanction at least, if they did not proceed by his express command. The law of God had plainly enjoined, that there should be only one place for God's

altar, and that all the tribes should offer their sacrifices *there*[a]. It also commanded, that, if any attempt should be made by any part of Israel to establish idolatry among them, the remainder, after due inquiry, should cut them off with the sword[b]. This then was an interference of magistrates in support of the laws: and it was indispensably necessary that they should interfere, to prevent so fatal a schism as was likely to arise.

We would not be understood to say, that civil magistrates would be justified in using the sword for the prevention or punishment of schism *now*. The true Church is not so accurately defined now, as that any one body has a right to assume to itself the exclusive privilege of being called The Church of Christ: nor is there any commission given to magistrates to use carnal weapons in the support of any particular system, either of doctrines or of discipline, in the Church: but where, as in the instance before us, there appears to be a public renunciation of all religion, and a profane contempt of all laws, the magistrate is bound to interfere; and every Christian in the land is bound to give him his support. *Opinions* are not within the cognizance of the civil magistrate, except when they are manifested in actions, or are so promulged as to endanger the peace and welfare of society: but, when carried to that extent, they justly come under his control. This vigilance however, though sufficiently exercised in relation to the things which concern the State, is but little seen in the suppression of profaneness and iniquity. We have laws against every species of iniquity; but they are not carried into effect. The fear of divine judgments on the land scarcely ever enters into the bosoms either of magistrates or people: hence, if only there be no flagrant violation of the peace, iniquity may prevail almost to any extent, without any one to vindicate the honour of God, or to avert his displeasure from a guilty land. In this respect there is an awful difference between the Israelites and us: insomuch that we, with all our superior advantages, are not worthy to be compared with them. Yet we must remember, that whenever we put forth the arm of power for the suppression of vice, our first object must be, by expostulation, to reclaim; nor must we ever inflict punishment, till milder measures have failed of success.]

This history will be yet further useful to us in the regulation of,

III. Religious zeal—

"It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing:" but our zeal should particularly exert itself,

[a] Deut. xii. 5, 7. [b] Deut. xiii. 12—15.

1. To prevent apostasy from God—

[This was the real object of the persons who raised the altar: they, in a most reverential and solemn manner, called God to witness that they had been actuated only by a desire to transmit to their posterity an indelible assurance, that they were as truly the Lord's people, as those who dwelt in Canaan; and that though their land was separated from that of their brethren, their interests and privileges were the same.

Here was a noble example of regard for posterity. It might have been better indeed to have consulted Joshua, or rather to have taken counsel of the Lord, respecting this measure, before they had carried it into execution: but holy zeal does not always pause to consider all possible effects and consequences; (though doubtless, the more tempered it is with wisdom, the more excellent it appears:) but God does not blame their conduct: and in this at least we shall do well to follow it, namely, by exerting ourselves in every possible way to transmit, and to perpetuate even to the remotest ages, the knowledge of God, as our God, our Father, and Redeemer.

The other tribes also manifested a noble zeal in the same cause, though by different means. They were fearful that this altar would be the means of turning many of their brethren from the worship of the true God; and they went forth at the peril of their lives to prevent it. It may be said, that these two were less temperate than they should have been: but, convinced as they were in their own judgment, their zeal was not at all more ardent than the occasion required. Though they spoke roughly, they spoke with candour, and with a perfect openness to conviction, if any thing could be said to justify the act. And their offer to surrender a part of their own possessions, in order to remove the temptation to which, in their own minds, they had ascribed the act, shewed, that they were actuated solely by a regard for God's honour and for Israel's good.

Here then is proper scope for all our zeal. We should remove, as far as possible, both from ourselves and from our children, every temptation to apostasy from God. We should rebuke sin in others also, and set ourselves against it to the uttermost. We should shew ourselves on all occasions on the Lord's side; and be willing to sacrifice, not only our property, but even life itself, in vindicating his honour, and maintaining his interest in the world.]

2. To preserve love and unity with man—

[If we find somewhat to blame in each of these opposite parties; in the one, an undue precipitation in building the altar; and, in the other, an undue hastiness in ascribing it to wrong intentions; we behold much, very much, to admire in

both. When the accusers found themselves mistaken, they did not shift their ground, and condemn their brethren for imprudence; nor, when the accused had evinced their innocence, did they condemn their accusers on the ground of uncharitableness and injustice: the one were as glad to acquit as the others were to be acquitted; and both united in unfeigned thankfulness to God, that all ground of dissension was removed.

Now it will almost of necessity sometimes happen, that the well-meant actions of our brethren shall be misconstrued, through an ignorance of their precise views and intentions: it may also happen, that the well-meant reproofs of our brethren may be founded in misconception. Here then is ample room for the exercise of well-tempered zeal. To avoid, on the one hand, unnecessary accusations, and gladly to retract them if they have been unwittingly adduced; and, on the other side, to avoid vindictive recriminations, and with pious meekness to satisfy the minds of any whom we may have unintentionally grieved; *this* is the spirit which we should continually cultivate: it should be the labour of our lives to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."]

3. To avert the divine judgments from our guilty land—

[It is a memorable expression which is recorded on this occasion; "Now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord[c]." Sin delivers us *into* his hand for punishment. Of this, the history of Israel in all ages is a decisive proof[d]. On the other hand, repentance delivers us *out of* his hand; as was remarkably exemplified in the case of Nineveh; which, but for the intervention of their penitence, would have been overthrown in forty days. But we need not go further than to the history before us, where this very effect is ascribed to the pious zeal of the Reubenites and Gadites. Happy would it be for us, if we all considered the effect of our conduct on the public welfare! God has no pleasure in punishing his creatures: and he is ever ready to remove his judgments, when they have produced in us the desired humiliation. Let us then approve ourselves to him: and then, though our zeal be misinterpreted, and even our own brethren be for a time incensed against us, our righteousness shall be made to appear, and our labours be crowned with the approbation of our God.]

[c] ver. 31.

[d] If this be the subject of a *Fast Sermon*, the judgments inflicted on us may be adduced as an additional proof.

## CCLVIII.

### GOD'S INTERPOSITIONS FOR US ARE OBLIGATIONS TO LOVE AND SERVE HIM.

Josh. xxiii. 10, 11. *The Lord your God, he it is that fighteth for you, as he hath promised you. Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God.*

MUCH as patriotism and valour are admired, and deservedly as, in many instances, they have been rewarded by men, they are of no value in the sight of God, if they be not accompanied with true piety. Their utility to the state of which we are members is undoubted; but their moral excellence depends on their union with religion. Abstracted from a regard to God, they are a mere compound of pride and selfishness; but, regulated by religion, they are in a high degree amiable and praiseworthy. Many bright examples of patriotism, united with piety, are set before us in the Scriptures; but none shines with greater lustre than that of Joshua: when his whole nation was sinking under desponding fears, he encouraged them by his unshaken fortitude and confidence in God[a]; and when he had vanquished all their enemies, and put them into the quiet possession of the promised land, he still improved his influence to confirm their faith, and to establish them in the paths of righteousness. The words before us are part of his dying address to all the elders of Israel. In applying them to the present occasion, we shall shew,

I. To whom our successes have been owing—

God has promised to interpose on behalf of those who wait upon him—

[His promises to hear the prayers of individuals are numberless[b]. And the same are made also to repenting nations[c].]

His interpositions on behalf of our nation have been signally manifest—

[We may be led to ascribe them to the valour of our forces, or the skill of our commanders. But it is God who

[a] Numb. xiv. 6—9. [b] Matt. vii. 7. [c] 2 Chron. vii. 14.

endues them both with skill and courage, and gives the victory to whomsoever he will. Besides, there have been many peculiar circumstances which owed their origin to him alone. And, while these mark his providential care, they compel us to acknowledge that "it is he who fighteth for us[d]."]

Nor are we without a hope, that his mercies to us have been sent in accomplishment of his promise—

[Many have mourned over the troubles of the land, and have made earnest intercession with God on our behalf. And though there is nothing *meritorious* in their petitions, yet when God sends the mercies for which we have prayed, we have reason to hope that he has sent them in answer to our prayers.]

Whatever may be our opinion respecting this, it becomes us to consider,

II. The improvement we should make of them—

Every mercy from God is an additional obligation to love and serve him—

[God has commanded us to love him with all our heart: and he is worthy of our supreme regard on account of the perfections of his nature, and the dispensations of his grace. But he is also to be loved in a peculiar manner for hearing and answering our prayers[e]. The effect produced on the mind of David, should result from every expression of the divine goodness towards us[f].]

But we are very prone to forget all his benefits—

[However earnest we may be in a season of affliction, we become remiss and careless when the affliction is removed. We are like metal, which is melted in the furnace, but returns speedily to its original hardness as soon as it is taken from the fire. Like the Jews we "forget the Rock that bought us." Even good "Hezekiah requited not the Lord according to all that he had done for him[g]." And too many amongst ourselves forget to pay the vows which we have offered in a time of trouble.]

On this account we should take good heed to remember them—

[Nothing is more displeasing to God than ingratitude.

[d] Here the particular circumstances may be mentioned, and be illustrated by Ps. xliv. 3.

[e] Ps. cxvi. 1. [f] Ps. xviii. 1. with the title of the Psalm.

[g] 2 Chron. xxxii. 25.

Nor will he overlook it even in his most highly favoured servants[h]. But "shall we thus requite the Lord?" Let us rather survey with gratitude the mercies we have received. Let us habitually behold the hand of God in them. And let us anxiously inquire, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all the benefits that he hath done unto me?"]

This subject may TEACH us,

1. Where to look for future successes—

[If we look to our fleets and armies we may expect nothing but defeat. We are indeed to use all possible means of defence, but not to trust in any of them[i]. Our eyes must be directed unto God alone. "The battle is not ours but his." "He can save by many or by few." Were we ever so superior to our enemies he could bring us down like Sennacherib[k]; or if we were reduced to ever so low an ebb, he could render us victorious[l]. And it is certain that if we "walk in pride, he will abase" us; but if we humbly seek his aid, he will support and deliver us.]

2. Where to look for success in our spiritual warfare—

[Whatever external peace we might enjoy, we yet should have a warfare to maintain. There never will be one moment's truce with our spiritual enemies. The world, the flesh, and the devil, will incessantly fight against us; and we must conflict with them even to the end. But God fighteth for those who put their trust in him. Let us call upon him, and he will clothe us with armour from the arsenal of heaven[m]. The Captain of our salvation will go forth with us to the battle. He will shield our head, and strengthen our arm, and make us "more than conquerors" over all. Let us then "*love him*" for the victories we have already gained. Let us take good heed to ourselves that we never rob him of his glory. Let us thankfully ascribe our every success to him[n]: and begin the song which we shall shortly sing in heaven, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ[o]."]

[h] 2 Chron. xxxii. 25. [i] Isai. xxii. 11. [k] Isai. x. 8—19.
[l] Isai. x. 4. [m] Eph. vi. 13. [n] Ps. cxv. 1.
[o] 1 Cor. xv. 57.

## CCLIX.

### GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO HIS PROMISES.

Josh. xxiii. 14. *Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which th-*

*Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.*

IT has been common in all ages to pay peculiar attention to the words of dying men: and the more eminent their characters were, the more regard has been shewn to their last instructions or advice. The person speaking in the text, was, in some points of view, distinguished even above Moses himself: for though Moses was the appointed instrument of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt, he was forced to leave them to the care of Joshua, who alone was commissioned to settle them in Canaan; and who was therefore a more illustrious type of Jesus, whose name he bore, and whose character he prefigured. The dying words of such a person, when speaking under the dictates of inspiration, may well be considered as calling for more than ordinary attention; especially when the scope of them was to vindicate the honour of God, and they were delivered in a way of solemn appeal to the whole nation of the Jews. But they have yet a further claim to our regard, because, though primarily applicable to those to whom they were immediately addressed, they are equally applicable to the Lord's people, in every place, and every age.

To illustrate them in this view, we shall,

I. Notice some of those good things which the Lord our God has spoken concerning us—

In order to mark, what we are principally to insist upon, the faithfulness of God in performing his promises, we will specify some that were made,

1. To the Church at large—

[God promised to the Church the gift of his dear Son[a] ——— the abiding presence of his Spirit[b] ——— and a final triumph over all our enemies[c] ———]

[a] Gen. iii. 15. Gen. xxii. 18. Deut. xviii. 18. Isai. vii. 14. and ix. 6. and liii. 6. Dan. ix. 24. Jer. xxiii. 6.

[b] Prov. i. 23. Isai. xxxii. 15. Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. John xv. 26. John xvi. 14. John xvi. 8. Zech. xii. 10. Rom. v. 5. 2 Cor. i. 22.

[c] Isai. xxvii. 2. and xxxiii. 20. and liv. 17. Jer. xxxi. 35—37. Matt. xvi. 18.

2. To individual members in particular—

[Though the names of individuals are not specified, their characters are delineated, and that too in such a way, that all who study the sacred oracles may read, as it were, their names in them. There are distinct promises made to the humble[d]——— the weak[e] ——— the tempted[f] ——— the backslidden[g] ——— and especially to them that trust in God[h] ——— In that class is every rank and order of true Christians comprehended, "Verily it shall be well with the righteous[i]."

These are "great," "exceeding great and precious, promises[k];" and the persons who correspond with the different characters, are at full liberty to apply them to themselves.]

Having taken a short view of the promises, we may proceed to,

II. Shew the faithfulness of God in fulfilling them—

There is in the minds of all who have heard the Gospel, a general conviction of the truth and faithfulness of God—

[It is seen that God has already fulfilled all that he has promised in reference to the Church at large. Besides what he did for the Jews[l], he has sent his Son; he has poured out his Spirit; he has maintained his Church, notwithstanding all the efforts that have been used both by men and devils to destroy it. And from hence we feel a persuasion, that his word shall be fulfilled in other respects also. We do not indeed suffer our convictions to operate as they ought; yet we revolt at the idea that "God should lie[m]," and we know that "he cannot deny himself[n]" ——]

All who have ever sought after God at all, have had proofs of his veracity in their own experience—

[The Israelites "knew in all their hearts, and in all their souls," that God had fulfilled his promises to them. And are there any who have ever called upon him, or trusted in him, and not found him ready to hear their prayers, and to supply their wants? If we look back to seasons of peculiar trial, shall

[d] Isai. lxvi. 2. Jam. iv. 6. Isai. lvii. 15.
[e] Isai. xlii. 3, 4. and xl. 11. and xli. 14, 15, 17, 18. 2 Cor. xii. 9. Amos ix. 9.
[f] 1 Cor. x. 13. Heb. ii. 18.
[g] Jer. iii. 14, 22. Hos. xiv. 4.
[h] Isai. xxvi. 3. Ps. cxxv. 1. Jer. xvii. 7, 8.
[i] Isai. iii. 10.
[k] 2 Pet. i. 4.
[l] Josh. xxi. 43—45.
[m] Numb. xxiii. 19.
[n] 2 Tim. ii. 13.

we not find some manifestations of his mercy, sufficient to shew, that, if we have not received more from him, it has been owing to our own backwardness to ask, rather than to any unwillingness in him to give? — — —]

Nor can the whole universe produce one single instance wherein his promises have failed—

[We can make the same appeal to you, as Joshua, after sixty years' experience, did to the Israelites. Bring forth every promise from the Bible; then search the annals of the world; and inquire of every creature in it, to find one single instance of God's violating or forgetting a promise: and if one instance can be *proved*, we will consent that his word shall henceforth be called in question. Tell us then, To whom has he "been a wilderness[o]?" What penitent, believing, and obedient soul hath he ever forsaken[p]? He himself bids you "testify against him[q]." But we defy the whole world to impeach his veracity, or to contradict our assertion, when we say, that "*all* which he hath promised us is come to pass; not one thing hath failed thereof" — — — God may have delayed the accomplishment of his promises, or fulfilled them in a way that was not expected: but not one of them has ever failed.]

ADDRESS,

1. Those who have not considered the faithfulness of God—

[In spite of the general conviction of God's truth that floats upon our minds, there is a proneness in us to indulge a thought, that his mercy will in some way or other interpose to prevent the execution of his threatenings. But the veracity of God is pledged as much for the accomplishment of his threatenings as of his promises: and of this he *labours in the most earnest manner* to persuade us[r]. How many, alas! are now experiencing in hell what they would not believe when they were on earth! Let us learn to "tremble at God's word." Let us remember, that though the antediluvian scoffers said, as others now do, "Where is the promise of his coming[s]?" he did come at last, though he bore with them a hundred and twenty years. And in like manner he will overwhelm us also at last with the deluge of his wrath, if we enter not into the ark before the door be shut against us — — — "We are going the way of all the earth," whether we be old or young, rich or poor: and as death finds us, so shall we remain for ever. Stay not then till death overtake you; but join yourselves to the

[o] Jer. ii. 31. [p] Heb. xiii. 5. Isai. xlix. 14, 15. and liv. 7—10.
[q] Mic. vi. 3. [r] Ezek. xxiv. 13, 14. [s] 2 Pet. iii. 3, 4.

Lord, and to his people. "Come with us, and we will do you good; for *the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel*[t]."]

2. Those who are tempted to doubt his faithfulness—

[Let not delays lead you to harbour unbelieving fears. God sent not his Son till four thousand years after he had announced his purpose to the world: nor did he bring Israel out of Egypt till the time fixed in his promises was just expired. If a few more hours had elapsed, his promise to Abraham would have been broken: but God remembered the very day; and then inclined the rebellious Pharaoh to submit: yea, he disposed the Egyptians to "*thrust his people out*" from their land, on "*the self-same day*" that he had fixed four hundred and thirty years before[u]. Tarry then the Lord's leisure. Take the promises of God as your support, and "claim them as your heritage for ever[x]." Be not hasty in concluding that God will not accomplish them[y]; but take them with you to a throne of grace, and plead them as the saints of old were wont to do[z]: then you shall find them all to be "yea, and amen, in Christ[a]." "If things be marvellous in your eyes, do not imagine that they must therefore be so in the eyes of God[b];" for as "there is nothing too *hard* for him" *to do*, so there is nothing too *great*, or too *good*, for him to *give* to his believing people.]

3. Those who are relying on his faithfulness—

[It cannot but be a source of unspeakable comfort to observe, in how many passages the faithfulness of God is expressly pledged for the performance of his promises. Does he promise to forgive our sins[c], to deliver us from temptation[d], to further in us the great work of sanctification[e], and to preserve us to the end[f]? We are told in each, that he is "*faithful* to do it" for us. It is also delightful to reflect, that "his word is *tried*[g]." Solomon's testimony was precisely that which is given in the text[h]: and, the more we trust in God, the more evidence shall we have that "he keepeth covenant and mercy to a thousand generations[i]." But remember that his fidelity to you requires in you fidelity to him: it lays you under a tenfold obligation to "hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering[k]." See then that ye bear in mind the vows that are

[t] Numb. x. 29. [u] Exod. xii. 51. [x] Ps. cxix. 111.
[y] 1 Sam. xxvii. 1. Ezek. xxxvii. 11. [z] Gen. xxxii. 12.
[a] 2 Cor. i. 20. [b] Zech. viii. 6. [c] 1 John i. 9.
[d] 1 Cor. x. 13. [e] 1 Thess. v. 23, 24. [f] 2 Thess. iii. 3.
[g] 2 Sam. xxii. 31. [h] 1 Kings viii. 56. [i] Deut. vii. 9.
[k] Heb. x. 23.

upon you, and that ye execute all that ye have undertaken in your baptismal covenant. Labour to be found "children that will not lie; so will He be" your faithful and almighty "Saviour[1]."]

[1] Isai. lxiii. 8.

## CCLX.

### JOSHUA'S COVENANT WITH ISRAEL TO SERVE THE LORD.

Josh. xxiv. 21—27. *And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the Lord. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel. And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which he spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God.*

THE pious servants of God may be disabled through age and infirmities from continuing their personal exertions, but they never will relax their zeal in the service of their Divine Master; and what they want in effective labours, they will endeavour to supply by stimulating and confirming the zeal of others. Moses, at an advanced age, renewed with Israel in the land of Moab the covenant which he had forty years before made with them in Horeb[a]: and Joshua in like manner, now that he was "waxed old and stricken in age," and was speedily "going the way of all the earth," convened all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, for the purpose of engaging them once more to give themselves up to God in a perpetual covenant; that so the good effects of his

[a] Deut. xxix. 1.

influence might remain, when he should have ceased to move them by his authority and example.

We shall,

I. Consider the covenant which he made with them—

The covenant itself was, that they should serve the Lord—

[Not contented with requiring this of them in general terms, he specified the manner in which they must serve the Lord. They must serve him *sincerely*. It was not sufficient for them to call themselves his people, and to observe his ordinances with hypocritical exactness: their hearts must be fixed upon him; their delight must be to do his will; they must have no secret reserves of unmortified corruption; but must serve the Lord "in sincerity and truth[b]."

They must also serve him *resolutely*. It might "seem evil to them to serve the Lord," yea, it might be accounted so by the whole nation; but they must be inflexible in their purpose, and determinately say with him, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord[c]."

They must also serve him *exclusively*. The admonition in the 19th verse is variously interpreted. Some think it was an objection in the mouth of an adversary, to deter persons from the Lord's service: others think it was a strong statement of the difficulties attending the Lord's service, suggested by Joshua for the purpose of stirring up the Israelites to more fixedness of purpose, and greater energy in their exertions. But we apprehend that the whole context determines the passage to a very different meaning. There were still among them some idols, which, though they did not worship, they valued and were averse to part with: and Joshua saw, that, if these were retained, the people would in time relapse into idolatry: he warned them therefore of the impossibility of their serving God acceptably whilst they retained these; and assured them, that God would never forgive them, if they did not put away the things which were sure to prove to them an occasion of falling. The following warning in the 20th verse, and the exhortation in the 23d, shew most satisfactorily, that this is the true meaning of the passage we refer to. God must be served *alone*: his glory will he not give to another: he is a "*holy*" God, that will tolerate no secret lust; and a "jealous God, that will endure no rival in our hearts, or in our hands."]

Having stated to them the terms of the covenant, he calls them to ratify and confirm it—

[b] ver. 14. [c] ver. 15.

[Covenants are usually signed by the parties themselves, and then attested by others, as witnesses. Thus on this occasion he calls the Israelites to confirm and ratify this covenant by their own express consent, which they give in terms no less plain than if they had annexed to the covenant their own name and seal. The manner in which they do this is peculiarly worthy of observation: they first express their utter abhorrence of the very idea of departing from God[d]: and then, assigning their obligations to Jehovah as a reason for their determination, they declare their fixed purpose to serve him, and him only[e]. Upon Joshua's expressing the jealousy which he entertained respecting them on account of their backwardness to cast away their idols, they renewed their declarations with increased energy[f]. Then, when reminded that they will be witnesses against themselves, if ever they should turn aside from God, they voluntarily engage to be witnesses, and thereby affix, as it were, to the covenant their signature and seal[g]: and lastly, on being required to give evidence of the sincerity of their professions, they renew their protestations with more strength and energy than ever[h].

Joshua now calls other witnesses. He wrote their words upon the very copy of the law which Moses had deposited in the ark, that *that* might remain an everlasting witness against them: and then he "took a large stone, and set it up there under an oak, that *that* also might be a witness against them," if ever they should depart from God: thus taking care, that, the covenant being fully attested, they might be convicted, and condemned, and be for ever without excuse before God and man, if they should ever forget and deny their God[i].]

The zeal which Joshua shewed on this occasion will be approved by all: we may hope therefore to perform an acceptable service to you, whilst, with an eye to that covenant, we,

II. Propose the same to you—

The duty of serving the Lord our God will be denied by none; and least of all by those who know the obligations which they owe to him for redeeming them from death by the blood of his only-begotten Son — — — But we beg leave to retrace, with application to yourselves,

1. The engagements you have entered into—

[d] ver. 16. [e] ver. 17, 18. [f] ver. 21.
[g] ver. 22. [h] ver. 23, 24. [i] ver. 26, 27.

[You are bound to serve the Lord your God, *sincerely, resolutely, exclusively.*

There must be no dissimulation in this matter: you must have "truth in your inward parts:" to "call him 'Lord, Lord,' will be of no use, if you do not the things which he says." His word must be the *rule*, his will the *reason*, his glory the *end* of your obedience — — —

You will find that many will account the service of God an "*evil*" thing; odious in itself, injurious to society, and contemptible in all who addict themselves to it. You will find also that the great mass of nominal Christians are alienated from the life of God, as much as ever the Jews of old were. For the truth of this we appeal to the lives of all around us. Yet you must "not follow a multitude to do evil," or forbear to walk in the narrow path of life, even though the whole world should urge you to accompany them in the broad road that leadeth to destruction. Nay; you must not only be steadfast yourselves, but must exert all your influence to animate and encourage others: you must adopt the noble resolution of Joshua, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"

You must be on your guard too against harbouring any "idol in your heart[k]." Sensuality, or covetousness, or any other unmortified lust, will provoke God to jealousy, as much as gods of wood and stone: and if any one sin be willingly retained, any one service wilfully neglected, or any sacrifice deliberately withheld, we must say with Joshua, "The Lord will not forgive your transgression and your sin:" "an eye, or a hand or foot, retained in opposition to his command, will cause the whole body, and soul too, to be cast into hell:" he only that will "lose his life for Christ's sake, shall find it unto life eternal" — — —]

2. The witnesses that will attest your violation of them—

[You must be "witnesses against yourselves:" your own consciences will testify, if, when you are convinced that it is your duty to serve the Lord, you continue to neglect him. Well are we assured that we have even now within your own bosoms a witness to the truth of all that we affirm — — —

But there will be other witnesses against you. The word that we speak, the same will testify against you in the last day: for it is written "in the book of God's remembrance," and reserved in the sanctuary to be brought forth as the evidence of God's righteousness and the ground of his procedure. I may add too, The very walls wherein we are assembled will testify against you: to use the strong language of our text, "they

[k] Ezek. xiv. 3, 4.

have heard all the words that have been spoken to you," the faithful declarations, the earnest entreaties, the rich encouragements: yes, "the stones out of the wall will cry out against you[1]," if you continue to violate your baptismal engagements, and indulge an indifference to all the subjects of your prayers. Times without number have you prayed, that you might "live a righteous, sober, and a godly life, to the glory of God's holy name;" and yet, many of you at least, have either never set yourselves in earnest so to live, or have carelessly declined from the ways of God, and forgotten the vows that are upon you. Finally, God himself also will be "a swift witness against you." Yes, "he searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins, and will give to every man according to his works."]

APPLICATION—

["Choose ye now whom ye will serve." To unite God and Mammon is impossible: "if Baal be God, serve him: but if the Lord be God, then serve him" — — —]

[1] Hab. ii. 11.

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON:—R. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD-STREET-HILL.